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JANE LOMAX;

OR

A MOTHER'S CRIME.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "BRAMBLETYE HOUSE,"

"REUBEN APSLEY," &c.

— "Was't not to make thee great,
That I have run, and still pursue, these ways,
That hale down curses on me?"

MASSINGER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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JANE LOMAX.

CHAPTER I.

“Oh, proper stuff!

This is the very coinage of your brain;

This is the air-drawn dagger that you said

Led you to Duncan.”

SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN the unfortunate Lomax recovered his senses, he found himself lying at the bottom of the carriage, unable, in the bewilderment of the moment, to account for his situation, or for the great exhaustion of his powers. As the occurrences of the morning slowly and sadly

returned to his recollection, he raised himself, not without difficulty, upon the seat, and, upon stealing a glance at the houses, ascertained that he was not far from his own dwelling.

Lassitude having now succeeded to terror, he no longer shook all over, but a cold perspiration bathed his features; he felt totally unnerved; and his efforts to rally his energies, that he might not excite the suspicion of the servants, when he alighted at his own door, were only partially successful, for his disordered dress and his aghast looks, of which he was unconscious, sufficiently revealed to them that something had powerfully disturbed their master.

Upon his entering the parlour, and beholding the partner of his guilt—for he did not at first perceive his children—his assumed composure suddenly deserted him. Groaning aloud as he sunk into a chair, he murmured, in a hollow voice, “I have seen him!—we are

discovered—it is all over—he pursues us—we must fly—we must fly instantly ! ”

“ Mary — Benjamin,” said the mother, whose presence of mind never deserted her, “ leave us alone for the present — retire from the room ; your father is not well—he knows not what he says—this hot weather often overcomes him.”

The calm tone in which these words had been pronounced was changed for one of unmeasured and bitter contempt, when, upon their having quitted the apartment, she exclaimed to her husband —“ Idiot and dastard ! are you drunk or mad, that you thus compromise us both with our children ? *We* are discovered—*we* must fly instantly ! Speak for yourself, and sink by yourself, if your own mouth is to be the leak through which your secret is to escape, and the engulfing waters are to be let in. What fresh hobgoblin have you encountered ? what new raw-head-and-bloody-

bones have you seen, or imagined, that you come home in this scarecrow plight, and with such hang-dog looks ? ”

“ *Him !*—I have seen *him !*—seen him with my own eyes.”

“ Waking or asleep ? is it a nightmare of the light or of the darkness ? and who is the nameless being that has thus shattered your mind and body ? ”

“ The terrible one ! — the unknown ! — the secret witness of our death-involving deed ! ”

“ Ha ! ha ! ha ! I guessed as much—the shadow of an apparition—the likeness of a nonentity. For shame ! for shame ! how can you suffer yourself to be thus cowed by an illusion ? ”

“ Jane, Jane ! this is no dream or vision—no suggestion of my fear or fancy, nor was it ever such. I *did* see the man peering at us from the area window—it *is* the same whom I beheld to-day. Oh ! how terrible and search-

ing is his eye ! If you believe not me, will you doubt the averment of others ? Our enemy has commenced operations—we are lost—we must fly !”

Lomax now succinctly related, not without several starts of terror when he heard the least noise, or a ring at the bell, the statement of the clerk at Doctors’ Commons, the scene of the execution, and the manner in which he had been transfixed by the appalling stare of the stranger.

“There may be five thousand men in London who answer to this description,” said the wife. “In spite of your reiterated asseverations, I persist in affirming that the supposed man in the area was the mere phantom of your fear, and, consequently, that his imaginary apparition at the corner of the Old Bailey was no more formidable, notwithstanding his saucer eyes, than any other individual in the crowd. As to the execution, we know beforehand that

the forgery of a will is a capital offence, which is never pardoned, the ocular demonstration of which fact should only warn you against these wild and haggard looks, and these self-betraying exclamations, lest you yourself should dangle in a cotton cap, like the wretch upon whom you have just been gazing."

"Horrible!" ejaculated the husband, with a shudder; "my flesh creeps at the very thought. How can you allude to such a frightful event with so much apparent levity?"

"Self-possession is not levity, and why should I share your abject trembling? In nothing that has occurred do I perceive the smallest ground for apprehension."

"Amazing! I had almost said incredible! Will you deny that a stranger, answering to the description I have given, has been taking a copy of the will?"

"No; but I care not a rush whether he be tall or short, old or young, in a low or high-

crowned hat. He may have been employed by some of Hoffman's German relations, without any hostile intentions; and, whatever be his object, the law's delay will allow us abundant time to escape, if we are driven to that extremity, which I do not at all anticipate. To confront and defy danger is to conquer it; to fear and to forestall is to invite it; and I see ten times more peril in your terrified visage and tell-tale tongue, than in all the machinations of your tall, thin, hurlothrumbo in the low-crowned hat."

"How true," exclaimed Lomax, with a sigh, "was the observation of the man standing by the carriage-window, when he said that the guilty never enjoy their unlawful gains! For this I can vouch by my own wretched experience. May Heaven falsify his friend's prediction that the forgers of wills never escape discovery and punishment. 'The halter they constantly wear about their neck seldom fails

to throttle them in the end.' These were his words, and methinks I already feel a strangling sensation in the throat."

"Ay, you will think any thing but sense, and feel every thing but courage. Verily, you are the most chicken-hearted of men, or rather of irrational creatures. A schoolboy would be ashamed of such weakness."

Mrs. Lomax's supreme contempt for her husband, and her anger at his self-accusations and perilous betrayal of alarm before Benjamin and Mary, blinded her to the fact that at the present moment he stood too much in awe of a greater danger to be afraid either of her scorn, her ridicule, or her indignant upbraidings.

His very terrors giving him courage to retaliate her sarcasms, and even to retort her threats, an altercation ensued of a more fierce and menacing character than any by which their passions had been hitherto inflamed.

Lomax, more positive than ever, of the reality of the man whom he had seen in the kitchen area, and convinced of his identity with the individual by whose basilisk eyes he had that morning been transfixed, was eager to make arrangements for the conversion of their property into money, and their instant flight.

At the instigation of the wife, the stock had been invested in their joint names, so that neither could sell without the acquiescence and signature of the other, and she now positively refused to comply with the wishes of her husband. From a feminine love of domination, or, perhaps, from the natural ascendancy which a strong mind feels itself entitled to assume over a weak one, she wished every thing to emanate from herself. "Leave all to me," was her reply to his reiterated entreaties that she would not endanger the whole family by a misplaced confidence, which deserved no other name than that of temerity,

if it might not rather be designated a judicial blindness. "When the peril approaches, or is even distinctly visible," she continued, "I will either defeat or escape from it. Danger exalts my courage as much as it depresses your's : I know not how I could place my own bravery in a more conspicuous light. Attempt not to act independently of me ; no separate interest must weaken our mutual liability ; nothing can divide us ; in every thing we must hang together."

"Hang !" ejaculated Lomax, with a recoiling start.

"Blockhead and poltroon ! I meant not literally ; but your convict looks seem to anticipate my averment. Be it so : I repeat to you that we must act together, and live together, or ——*die* together !"

Lomax, now becoming ten times more wretched than ever, took more frequent refuge from his misery in the temporary oblivion produced by

intoxication; and the conjugal truce which had suspended for a while the mutual bickerings of this unhappy pair, now broken, irreparably and for ever, was succeeded by an alienation only the more bitter and absolute because they were compelled to live together beneath the same roof, and to maintain a hollow show of courtesy towards each other.

Mrs. Lomax had truly declared that her courage invariably rose with the necessity for its display; but her fortitude was not proof against the incessant gnawings of a guilty conscience, nor could she withstand the perpetual wear and tear of her husband's indiscretion and imbecility, which suspended the sword of Damocles over her head, and fretted a spirit which scarcely any thing could frighten.

In the morning, his obscure and muttering soliloquies assumed a still more perilous character than heretofore; his evening wanderings, not seldom aggravated by intemperance, were

sufficient to excite suspicion, even when they did not threaten some fatal divulgement; and to the hideous phantasms of the night had now been superadded a fearful habit of somnambulency, fraught with all sorts of terrors and dangers.

To nullify, if possible, the effect of these infirmities, Mrs. Lomax did not scruple to inform her friends that her husband's mind, never very strong, had been so much affected by his good fortune as to be liable to occasional aberrations, a result which, as she truly stated, was by no means rare under similar circumstances.

By this fiction, which was soon whispered about in the neighbourhood, suspicion was lulled, and all his oddities were attributed to a partial disorder of his faculties. To some of the inmates of the house, however, who had closer and more frequent opportunities of observation, this pretext did not prove altogether satisfactory. In secret conclave, the servants would hint to

each other their suspicions that all was not right, and that their master's disquietude might proceed from a guilty conscience.

Benjamin, who was by nature candid, confiding, and unsuspicious, attributed his father's change of demeanour, and evident perturbation of spirits, to the cause assigned by his mother ; under which persuasion he sought to alleviate his calamity by all the good offices which his affectionate and dutiful heart could suggest.

So did Mary, whose superior penetration, however, would not allow her to be so easily hoodwinked. The undefined misgivings with which she was almost afraid to trust her own heart, revealed themselves in the additional dejection of her air, and the unconscious tear that would occasionally steal down her cheek. Her quick-sighted mother, reading her thoughts with the intuitive apprehensiveness of guilt, resented her silent sorrow as an implied reproach, and even became jealous of her atten-

tions to her father. Her darling Benjamin had always engrossed the whole of her parental affections, and, as we are generally averse from those whom we have injured, she sometimes conducted herself towards Mary with a coldness that evinced an almost total indifference, though it had not yet amounted to positive dislike. Under the joint influence, however, of a soured temper and a saddened heart, aggravated by the jealousy to which we have just alluded, she began to treat her now with a harshness which the poor girl was utterly unable to explain, and which she felt the more sensibly, because she knew it to be utterly unmerited.

Mary, whose mind was scarcely less vigorous though much better regulated than that of her mother, was not of a temperament to be permanently depressed by this manifest injustice. If the sense of what was due to her parent would not allow her to resent, or even to com-

plain of it, the feeling of what was due to herself prevented her from succumbing beneath it.

Discharging all her duties with the same assiduous punctuality as ever, her heart sought relief from the squabbles of her alienated parents and the splendid misery of Cypress House in the society of such congenial minds as the now extended circle of her acquaintance afforded her. Among these, her affections settled more especially upon Helen Owen and Rose Mayhew, the predilection which she had conceived for the former in their first interview quickly ripening into intimacy and unreserved friendship; while she fully appreciated the talents and the genius of Rose, though she could not so fully sympathize with her romantic turn, and almost morbid sensibility.

If these friends delighted her by their kindred tastes and qualities, others intruded themselves upon her acquaintance who amused

her by the total uncongeniality of their character.

Foremost in this list stood Mr. Jasper Pike, a spruce-looking, dapper bachelor, at least forty years of age, the neatness of whose carefully preserved habiliments, in conjunction with a certain briskness of walk and manner, showed that he still considered himself to merit his *qi-devant* title of a smart young man, although his half-bald head and dried aspect did not fully support his claims. His small grey eyes indicated cunning not unmingled with suspicion, his sharp nose betokened a correspondent keenness, and his thin compressed lips an answerable closeness of disposition ; and yet he could not be pronounced ill-looking. An habitual smirk gave animation to his countenance, his teeth were fine, and he wore the look of a man who seemed to be upon friendly terms both with himself and the world. For the latter he had tolerably good reason, as, without the fa-

tigues and anxieties of any regular business, he had contrived to improve an insignificant patrimony into a comfortable independence by watching the different markets, and speculating in stocks or merchandize, whenever a favourable opportunity occurred. Compared with his narrow inexpensive mode of living, he might be pronounced rich ; judged by his penurious habits, and close calculation in the minutest trifles, he would be deemed a pauper ; though, in the midst of all this uneasy parsimony, he failed not, at times, to make a boast of his easy circumstances.

“ As I have been the means of introducing you to the acquaintance of Mr. Jasper Pike,” said Helen Owen, one morning to her new friend, “ and as I have gained some insight into his character, both from personal observation, and the hints of my uncle Bryant, who has known him for many years, I think it right for your good guidance, seeing that the crea-

ture is a bachelor, apparently looking out for a moneyed wife, to give you the result of my experience. But, before I do so, tell me with your usual frankness what is your own impression of him ? ”

“ That is rather a delicate question,” said Mary, hesitatingly ; “ the gentleman is a friend—nay, I have been told an admirer—of your’s.”

“ An admirer of my purse he may be, but, as to my person, I believe that he views it, as he does our whole sex, with supreme indifference. Dr. Johnson has flippantly and falsely asserted that any woman would marry Jonathan Wild rather than Saint Austin, if he had three pence more. Now, in this respect, Mr. Pike resembles the doctor’s fabled female. If he believes that you have a hundred pounds more than I have, I shall be instantly eclipsed, and you will become the goddess of his idolatry, until he can find a richer divinity to whom he may offer his venal homage. Mr. Jasper Pike,

in short, is one of a class solely to be found in that province covered with houses which we denominate London, in the midst of whose dense and almost countless population a man may live in so perfect a solitude, so totally free from all observation, even of his nearest neighbours, so completely independent of the influences and responsibilities of public or private opinion, that, the social and moral qualities never being called upon to develop themselves, die away, and the innate selfishness of his heart may be fostered with full impunity, safe from all reproach or detection."

"Unless he should be exposed to the scrutiny of so keen an observer as yourself."

"Ay, ay, you and I are exceptions to the dull crowd, who, like owls, are purblind in the light. In the country, a man cannot, as in London, hide himself among a million and a half of his fellow-creatures, and become a deserter from the performance of his duties.

The eyes of his neighbours are upon him ; he is amenable to public opinion ; he is, moreover, registered and enrolled in the parish books ; he must share all the liabilities of his station and his fortune ; he must discharge his obligations, whether public or domestic, whether municipal, parochial, or social. In the metropolis, almost every thing of this sort may be evaded, if a man be mean and sordid enough to make the attempt. A guinea subscription to a district or a mendicity society acquits the London selfist of all claims on the score of charity ; and, as to any other demands, upon his time, his purse, or his talents, he carefully withdraws from them, not scrupling to employ the most paltry shifts and subterfuges for the accomplishment of his object."

"Your description of this class does not give me a very elevated opinion of Mr. Pike."

"It will not be raised when I add that he

belongs to a subdivison still less amiable in its characters. Many of the selfish beings I have been portraying ‘assume a virtue if they have it not,’ and are so far ashamed of this egotism as to conceal it. But Mr. Pike boasts of his total indifference to all interests but his own ; he would take every advantage of the world, and reciprocate none ; he would grasp all he can get, and give nothing in return, and this he holds to be an irrefragable proof of superior shrewdness and sagacity.”

“Meaning craft and dishonesty,” said Mary, “for I deem such utter selfishness little better than negative swindling.”

“True, but it is legal, and this is his defence. ‘I offend no law,’ he exclaims ; ‘nay, I act in conformity to the great primary rule that self-preservation is the first law of nature, for I do but practice my finesses against those who are seeking to take advantage of me in some way or other. It is a man’s paramount

duty to preserve his property, his time, and his occupations, for his own comfort and advantage.' Mr. Pike is bold, in short, in avowing his total want of all social principle, while in every thing else his cowering selfishness and his fear of incurring any sort of responsibility or personal danger render him as timid as a hare."

"But what says he to the obligations imposed upon us by the moral law? What says he to the injunctions of religion that we should love our neighbour as ourselves?"

"Why, he confines it to spinsters who have property of their own. He affects to love me for instance, and he will love you still more tenderly when he has ascertained that you are richer. He measures every thing by —"

The conclusion of her speech was prevented by the entrance of the servant to announce Mr. Pike.

"What is said of Old Nick," whispered

Helen, "that we no sooner talk of him than he appears, is equally applicable, I find, to the whole family."

CHAPTER II.

“ And he is oft the wisest man,
Who is not wise at all.”

WORDSWORTH.

“ AHA, ladies !” exclaimed the visiter, as he jerked into the room, springing upon his toes, and affecting a youthful jauntiness ; “ do I find you together ? this is, indeed, lucky ; it is killing two birds with one stone, for I intended to have done myself the pleasure of calling at Cypress House, and shall be happy to *beau* Miss Lomax, if she is wending homeward. You see, young ladies, I am not struck silent, like Captain Macheath, when he encountered two beauties at once :

‘ How happy could I be with either,
Were t’other dear charmer away,
But, while you thus plague me together,
To neither a word will I say—
But Tol-de-rol — lol-de-rol-lol.’ ”

Mr. Pike sang this verse with an affected *nonchalance*, though in reality he exerted the best powers of a voice which had never been good, and had now become as thin and dry as himself.

“We feel infinitely flattered,” said Mary, “by your informing us that we plague you, as well as by your comparing us to the damsels in the Beggars’ Opera, both of whom, if I mistake not, were admirers of the gallant captain.”

“Nay, now, this is unkind, Miss Lomax ; this is wounding me in the tenderest point, for, if there is any thing upon which I pique myself, it is upon my profound respect for the fair sex.”

“I think we must forgive him,” cried Helen ; “it is quite natural that he should mistake himself for Captain Macheath, and the rest is, therefore, excusable.”

“So far, indeed, I may be said to resemble

him, that I have always been a man for the ladies."

"How, then, are we to account for your still being a bachelor, unless we are to presume that you have never been a lady's man?" asked Helen.

"Really, now, you are more severe than your friend. It becomes me not to boast, but, a person like me, well known to be in independent circumstances, need not long wear the willow, unless by his own choice. I am no advocate for *very* early marriages; perhaps, too, I am difficult to please; but, when I find a suitable partner in every respect, and one, moreover, who unites beauty with virtue, I should desire nothing better than to strike my bachelor flag, and surrender at discretion."

At the conclusion of this speech, he fixed his eyes upon Mary, with a significant smirk.

"Ah!" thought Helen, as she smiled at her friend, "*my* chance is lost; he has weighed

us both in his money scales, and I am found wanting in the balance."

This lucky guess was a literal truth, for he had ascertained, through the means of a clerk in the Bank, the exact amount of stock standing in the name of Joel Lomax and his wife, the result of which knowledge was a determination to cultivate their acquaintance, with an ultimate view to the chances of becoming their son-in-law ; and to renounce the hopes he had secretly formed of securing Helen Owen and her fortune, through his intimacy with her uncle.

"It is some distance to Cypress House," said Mary ; "and, as I presume, from Mr. Pike having brought his umbrella, that he anticipates rain, I must not delay my return."

"I can assure you, Miss," smirked the bachelor, "that there is no present appearance of rain ; but, as I never trust the weather out of my sight, I always carry an umbrella,

and invariably bring it up stairs with me, for I lost an old one some years ago, by leaving it in a gentleman's hall. In trifles of this sort, people are so selfish, I might say so dishonest! An umbrella is a wonderful preserver of clothes. Mine, you will observe, has a cane-stick to it; I am amazed how you ladies can carry parasols with metal rods, which must be exceedingly dangerous in a thunder-storm, and, I am sure, to judge by the present company, that you do not require any additional attraction to draw the sparks about you. He! he! he!"

He again smirked at Mary, as if to intimate that, although his compliment included both, it was only meant for one.

"An umbrella," continued the calculating Pike, "soon saves its cost in saving coach-hire. I scarcely ever get into a hackney-coach, for my chambers are in a central situation, and I am a famous walker."

"I cannot help fancying that a residence in chambers must be very lonesome and dull," observed Mary.

"True, Miss Lomax, very true, but look at the cheapness and the other advantages. I reside, for instance, in one of the inns of court, which is extra-parochial, so that I have no parish taxes to pay or duties to perform. Then, I am not a housekeeper, so that I may dine out all the year round, and cannot be called upon to give a single dinner in return. Besides, I am thus happily incapacitated for a thousand troublesome offices, which I might be called upon to perform, either for the public, or for my friends. I can neither be bail, nor juryman, nor drawn for the militia. I have always made it a rule to decline being trustee, or executor, or witness of any kind, scrupulously avoiding all liabilities or responsibilities, that might involve me in the smallest trouble ; a line of conduct which has not only kept me

out of hot water, but has made me independent of the whole world."

"But, still, there are certain taxes which you cannot avoid."

"Not many, not many," cried Pike, with a knowing nod and a wink of his eye. "Much may be done by a little management. It so happens that as the collector always leaves his notices for the income-tax at the same time of the year, he invariably finds my chambers shut up, the letter-box closed, and a little paper stuck over it, with the words, 'Gone away.' When the rogue has completed his rounds, I return to my rooms, and am ready to give him the slip next year in the same way. Leg-bail, you see, Miss Lomax, is the only bail I am competent to give, not being a householder. He! he!"

"But, is this honest?" inquired Mary, with a look expressive of contempt.

"Honest! to be sure it is, and lawful, too.

Surely, I may go out of town what time I please, and return when I please. I tell no untruth. I *am* gone away for the time. It is not my business to be running after tax-gatherers. Every man for himself, and God for us all; that's my motto. You see, we single fellows lead a merry life: I owe no man a shilling, and am well tiled in, as the phrase goes; and yet, as I before said, I am, and always have been, devoted to the fair sex, and can have no earthly objection to settle down as a married man, when I meet with such a partner as I have a right to expect, and one whose fortune is equal to my own."

Here he ogled Mary in a manner that was meant to be tender, though it was merely vulgar and impertinent, for the bachelor could not get rid of an unfortunate self-sufficiency of manner, that rendered him often most offensive when he meant to be most ingratiating. "Out of the question of marriage," he continued,

turning to Helen, "I make no distinctions, and am proud to call myself the most devoted humble servant of the ladies in general."

"On the part of whom," said Helen, placing her hands before her, and making him a burlesque curtsy,—“I beg to inform you that I appreciate your homage *as it deserves*.”

Mary now rose to take her departure, accompanied by Helen, who had agreed to spend the afternoon at Cypress House; and, as Mr. Pike offered his services to *beau* them, (such was his usual phrase) they accepted his escort, though his officious politeness, or rather his selfish timidity and over-carefulness, rendered him a troublesome companion.

"Cross the street, ladies, if you please; quick, quick!" was one of his first exclamations; "do you not observe that the old houses on this side are badly roofed? the wind is blowing strong, and it would not be so pleasant to have a tile upon one's head. It is astonishing,

though, how often one may get into trouble by anxiety to avoid it! Once, just as I had adopted the precaution we have now been using, a tile which, if I had remained where I was, would have passed me without injury, was blown quite across the street, and wounded me so severely in the leg, that I was laid up for a month. On another occasion, in my hurry to avoid the splashing of a hackney-coach—those drivers never think of one's clothes—I fell down an area, bruised myself severely, upset a bucket of hog-wash, and completely spoilt a new pair of pantaloons.”

At this catalogue of calamities, the last of which was uttered with a most feeling emphasis, Helen laughed outright, asking her companion whether it might not be sometimes better for Mr. Pike to trust to fate and chance, than to depend upon his own clever management, which, like a will-o'-the-wisp, seemed to be always leading him into scrapes and quagmires.

“No,” was the reply ; “since I do every thing by calculation, I have, at all events, the satisfaction of knowing that I act upon a right system.”

“That may be questioned when the intended self-preservation so often turns out to be self-injury. Long-sighted people, who are perpetually peering out for distant dangers, are very apt to overlook those that are immediately beneath their nose, like the old philosopher who fell into a pond while he was gazing at the moon, and might have seen the moon in the pond if he would only have looked straight before him.”

To this observation Pike made no reply, for, having perceived that the dust was blowing rather detrimentally upon his coat, he quitted his outside position, and placed himself between his companions, declaring that he never felt himself so proud as when he had a lady upon each arm. Scarcely had he

achieved this polite and gallant act, when he trod upon a loose stone, which, liberally besprinkling him with dirty water, drew from him the remark that he certainly was the most unfortunate person in the world, since the more he attempted to avoid accidents and annoyances, the more sure he was to encounter others of a worse description.

“May we not then reasonably conclude,” asked Helen, with a smile, “that the ill-fated fish which jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire was a Pike?”

“There can be no doubt he was one of my ancestors, whose propensity I have inherited,” replied the bachelor, stopping the progress of the party while he carefully rubbed off each individual splash with his pocket-handkerchief.

“I am afraid we must now wish you good morning,” said Mary, on their reaching the corner of the next street, “for we intend calling on Mrs. Skinner in our way home.”

“I shall be happy to accompany you,” was the bachelor’s reply; “for, though I am not particularly fond of over-strict people and saints, Skinner is a rich man, gives excellent dinners, and I shall be glad to pay him a visit, now that I am in this part of the world. It will save me coach or boat hire, on another day.”

Mrs. Skinner was a sour and sanctimonious gossip, whose original propensity to backbiting and slander was not only aggravated by ill-health and ill-temper, but by the discovery that her unregenerate neighbours, though not a tenth part so good and pious as herself, seemed to be ten times happier. To avoid, however, the imputation of being a scandal-monger, she had recourse to a disingenuous, though by no means uncommon, *finesse*, always pretending that the tales which had originated with herself had been communicated to her by others, whom she sharply rebuked for their

ensorious tongues. By this artifice, she indulged her own love of calumny, while she obtained a reputation with many simple-witted people for superior candour and liberality.

“What a capital dining-room we passed!” exclaimed Pike, as they entered the house: “the table was set out for twelve, and I never saw one more handsomely appointed, with ice-pails, and all. I wonder whether Mr. Skinner is at home, perhaps he might ask me. I thought I smelt *real* turtle, and I know he sometimes gives it.”

“I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting,” cried Mrs. Skinner, as she hastened into the room, panting for breath and red with anger; “but those good-for-nothing children are the plague of my life. They are afforded every opportunity in the world of becoming pious, orderly, and obedient, and yet, the more pains I take, the worse they seem to be. I have a godly governess, an excellent young woman,

who is very strict, who is authorized to correct them as she thinks fit, and upon whom I am perpetually inculcating that, as they are born in sin and the children of wrath, she must break their spirits, and whip the devil out of them while they are young. I am sure I do not spoil them myself by sparing the rod. Then they have such religious advantages : and yet little William flew at me and bit me just now, like a tiger-cat, merely because I was whipping him. I'll teach him to be passionate, a young tyrant !”

“ I have no doubt you will !” thought Helen, who was so fond of children, and so perfectly convinced that they might be still more effectually spoilt by over-severity than by over-indulgence, that she dared not trust herself with any reply to this unmaternal diatribe. Mary, who found the topic equally unpleasant, endeavoured to start some new one ; but the conversational powers of Mrs. Skinner were

so exceedingly limited in their range, that, wherever a subject might begin, it was sure to be presently twisted into the views, interests, and proceedings, of the little religious *coterie* to which she belonged.

As her auditors seemed to be but little conversant with some of these subjects, she contemplated them with that expression of demure and sour disdain which is almost peculiar to her class, until the name of Mrs. Hunter happened to be accidentally mentioned, when she gave a deep sigh, and exclaimed, with a look of commiseration : — “Poor woman ! I fear she has worse troubles to encounter than any she has yet experienced. That profligate, abandoned son of her’s !”

“I did not know that she had more than one,” exclaimed Helen. “You cannot, surely, be speaking of Mr. Alfred Hunter ?”

“Indeed but I am, and, as you may almost be said to be living under the same roof, you

ought to know what the world says of him. I am only amazed that Mr. Bryant, who is a sensible person, and a man of the world, should retain him in his employment, especially when he has two young ladies, and one of them a reputed heiress, inmates in his house. You were aware, of course, that Mr. Hunter has been a notorious gambler, that he has ruined his mother, and even purloined his sister's portion, which has been the occasion, poor thing! of breaking off her marriage, and destroying her happiness for ever. *That*, I fear, there is no denying. I have been told, by those who ought to know, that he drinks and mingles with profligate society; for this charge, however, I trust there is no foundation; I am the last person to say any thing unhandsome; but I have been most confidently assured that he is a professed infidel, and never goes to any place of public worship, which is an offence that never can be forgiven either in this world or in

the next. Now, if these things are not true, it is really quite monstrous that people should invent such wicked and abominable accusations.”

During the latter part of this speech, Helen’s bosom had been heaving with indignation, and her eyes sparkled as she prepared to vindicate the party thus deeply accused. Her purpose was prevented by the return of Mr. Pike, who had quitted the room some time before to seek for Mr. Skinner, in the hope of obtaining an invitation to partake of the turtle, and who now re-appeared, declaring, with a disappointed look, that his search had been ineffectual. Deeming it possible, however, that he might accomplish his object with the lady, he drew out his watch, and exclaimed, with a well-acted surprise, “Heavens ! I had no idea it was so late ! I shall lose my dinner ! I had engaged to meet two or three friends at the Mitre. How very unlucky ! and

in this part of the world I am such a stranger, that I scarcely know whither to betake myself."

Broad as was the hint, it drew not forth any reply from the inexorable lady of the house ; and the savoury smell, which he continued to sniff up with a marvellous satisfaction, was the only portion of the banquet in which the unlucky wight was destined to participate. Pike, indeed, who, though so well able to afford it, never gave an entertainment of any sort, was such a notorious sponger and smell-feast, that his acquaintance were somewhat slow to comprehend his allusions, however palpably he might spell for a dinner.

Helen and Mary now rose to take their departure, when Mrs. Skinner said she would accompany them to Cypress House, as she had long wished to have a little conversation with Mrs. Lomax. Whatever may be their motives, and we are far from denying that these may be

well meant even when most mistaken, the over-good folks of this class are generally distinguished by an insatiable mania for making converts, evincing considerable tact in selecting those junctures when their victims may be assailed with the greatest probability of success.

Not with a more unerring instinct does the vulture hie from afar towards his prostrate and defenceless prey — not with a more remorseless pertinacity does the gad-fly fix upon the sores and galled places of the animal he worries, than do these missionaries of misery swoop upon their intended proselytes, when their bodily strength is bowed down by sickness, or they are wounded in heart by sorrow and anxiety. Well do most of them know by their own experience that a wretched mind is the fittest recipient for a wretched bigotry, a morbid spirit the most likely to be infected with a diseased religion.

Mrs. Skinner had noticed for some time

past the secret disquietude and failing health of Mrs. Lomax, whom she had accordingly marked down as a fit subject for her spiritual machinations.

When the party was again *en route* for Cypress House, the bachelor, who was very pointed and officious in his attentions to Mary, would have possessed himself of her arm, but she evaded his purpose, attached herself to Helen, and left him to escort Mrs. Skinner, an arrangement by which he was by no means well pleased, having conceived an additional dislike for his companion since she had declined taking his hints about the dinner.

A few minutes after they had started, they were arrested by a sudden exclamation of "Stop ! stop !" from Pike ; when several people rushed hastily past them, and they perceived, at the other extremity of the street into which they had turned, a knot of men in blue jackets, vociferating angrily, and flourishing

bludgeons in the air, as if engaged in a scuffle.

“It seems to be a party of drunken sailors fighting together,” said Pike, as he ran into a little shop, and held the door in his hand, ready to close it. “You had better follow me, and take refuge here till the row is over.”

“There is hardly room for us all,” observed Helen.

“Hardly, indeed,” replied Pike, without offering to quit the situation he had secured ; “but there is another shop over the way, and I am sure nobody would be so ungallant as to refuse a place to the ladies.”

“You had better not huddle so close to the wall, sir,” said the shopwoman to Pike, “for we have just had it painted.”

“Well, I thought I smelt paint,” exclaimed the bachelor ; and, turning partially round, he beheld, with a horror which was instantly and vividly depicted on his countenance, that the

sleeves and skirt of his new blue coat were bedaubed with white. For the moment, the rueful spectacle actually deprived him of utterance, or perhaps he was disconcerted by the laugh which his young and fair companions (for Mrs. Skinner *never* laughed) found it impossible to suppress.

“It is really *very* remarkable,” at length sighed the sufferer, “that, whenever I exercise any unusual prudence or forethought, I am sure to meet with some special misfortune.”

“As you have succeeded in keeping your skin in a whole jacket,” smiled Helen, “you may well submit to its being a painted one.”

“Why, I must confess that I have a particular horror of a drunken sailor, for, in running away from an approaching party of them, I once fell over a dog and got sadly bitten in the leg, an accident which I should have avoided had I stood my ground, for the fellows turned down another street. I hope

the rogues whom we just saw scuffling together have done the same ; I hear no noise—all seems once more quiet.”

“Lauk, sir, these were a pressgang,” cried the shopwoman ; “and I fear, by their coming to blows, that some poor creature has been desperate enough to resist them.”

“A pressgang !” ejaculated Pike ; “Lord deliver us ! what a dangerous neighbourhood ! I trust the wretches have taken themselves off.”

“Yes, sir, they have all disappeared, and I suppose have carried off their prize with them.”

“Are you positive ? ” demanded the bachelor.

“Quite, sir ; there is not a soul in the street, for, as they are mostly seafaring people in this quarter, they soon get out of the way when a pressgang is known to be abroad.”

“Then we had better be jogging,” said Pike,

emerging from his retreat, and endeavouring to resume his usual brisk manner; "I hope none of the ladies were frightened."

"Oh, no! the alarm was not on our side," said Helen smiling.

"There was not the smallest ground for alarm on any side. None in the world," resumed Pike. "My unlucky coat seems to be the only sufferer. Allons! march."

The party advanced accordingly, until they reached the scene of the tumult they had witnessed; when Helen and Mary, who were in front, uttered a simultaneous cry of surprise, on their discovering a figure lying prostrate, and apparently insensible, close to the wall of a house.

"Some low, drunken fellow!" cried their companion; "you had better hurry on."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Helen; "by his dress and appearance, he is evidently not of the common class. Good Heavens! what shall we do to assist him?"

“Perhaps he has fallen down in a fit,” added Mary. With these words she ran up, for Helen seemed to be hesitating how to act, and turned the face of the stranger round towards the air, when they perceived that he was evidently a gentleman, and fresh exclamations of compassion and surprise burst from their lips, on their noticing his ghastly countenance and the death-like insensibility into which he had sunk. “He breathes, although his eyes are closed,” cried Mary. “It may be an attack of apoplexy — and yet he is quite young. He must have instant succour, or we know not what may happen. Dear Mrs. Skinner ! your house is close at hand ; will you allow me to summon some of the neighbours, that they may convey him thither ?”

“Quite impossible, Miss Lomax ; and I wonder you should venture to make so very strange and indelicate a proposition. I know nothing of the party ; he may be an impostor

or a thief, for dress and appearance prove nothing now-a-days. If I had ever seen him at Salem or Bethesda chapels, so as to be assured of his religious principles, it would be a different matter."

"Let him then be carried to my uncle's, at the Wharf, and I will be responsible for all the consequences," cried Helen.

"Nay," resumed Mary, "Cypress House is much nearer than Eagle Wharf, and we will have him immediately taken thither, since Mrs. Skinner objects to receive him."

"In that case," said the latter lady, "I shall defer my visit for the present; and indeed I now recollect there is a Tract Society meeting to-day, which I had promised to attend; so I must be under the necessity of wishing you good morning." With these words she coldly inclined her head, and hastily walked away down the next street.

"If you will have the goodness, Mr. Pike,

to run for a surgeon, I will collect a few of the neighbours, to carry this unfortunate gentleman to my father's," said Mary.

"It is painful to me to refuse any thing to the ladies, but in this instance you must really excuse me. I make it a rule never to interfere in affairs of this sort. Death may ensue ; then there will be a coroner's inquest, perhaps a public trial. I may be subpœnaed as a witness, and exposed to all sorts of annoyances and expenses, without getting a shilling for my time and trouble. Take my advice—have nothing to do with the business—it is no concern of your's. Send for a constable, and let the creature be carried to a chemist's or the Poorhouse."

"Both of these are distant. If we leave him, he may be robbed, or further maltreated ; perhaps he may perish. I am determined not to quit him till I see him deposited at Cypress House."

"There is poor Mrs. Skinner walking back

all alone," cried Pike; "that must not be. Politeness to the ladies is every thing. I will run after her, and accompany her home. Perhaps she may give me some spirits of turpentine to take the paint out of my coat." So saying, he ran hastily away, adding in a lower tone, "Or perhaps she may ask me to dinner after all; who knows?"

Alone and unprotected, in a neighbourhood which had just been disturbed by violence, both Helen and Mary might have felt the awkwardness of their situation, had not their thoughts been engrossed by anxiety to relieve the stranger as quickly as possible.

Helen's solicitude upon this subject almost defeated its object by the agitation into which it threw her; but her friend's collectedness and presence of mind did not for a moment desert her. Writing down the address of the nearest surgeon, she despatched a messenger to request his instant attendance, and then

hurrying to a house, from the window of which some men were gazing unconcernedly on the scene, she prevailed on them, by the promise of a reward, to take a door from its hinges, on which they placed the sufferer, and, raising him on their shoulders, proceeded at a quick walk towards Cypress House.

Mary followed as fast as she was able, but she was obliged to support her friend, whose energies seemed to fail her, now that the immediate necessity for their exertion had ceased, and who complained of a faintness which, for the moment, threatened to overcome her. A glass of water, however, helped to restore her powers; and, by leaning upon the arm of her companion, they were both enabled to reach Cypress House a few minutes after the arrival of the fainting stranger.

CHAPTER III.

“ Much she laboured to conceal
That gentlest passion of the breast,
Which all can feign, but few can feel :
Ingenuous fears the flame suppressed,
Yet still she owned its hidden power.”

CARTWRIGHT.

LOMAX, who lived in perpetual apprehension of an arrest by the officers of justice, no sooner saw a posse of strangers approaching, than he hurried to the door in the garden wall, intending to make his own escape by the river, should his fears be realised, and caring little or nothing for the fate of his wife.

A more accurate inspection of the party, as they crossed the court-yard, having satisfied

him that his forebodings were groundless, and that some accident had happened, he stole back to the house, and, on learning the nature of the occurrence, directed every assistance to be afforded. Little aid seemed to be required, for the patient's senses being presently restored, he opened his eyes, sate up on the sofa, and, having swallowed a cordial administered to him by the fair hand of Mary, was soon enabled to answer interrogatories without any apparent inconvenience.

He stated himself to be Evelyn Barlow, the son of a shipbuilder, at Deptford, adding that when he met the pressgang they were just placing handcuffs on one of his father's workmen, who, though he had formerly been a sailor, was no longer subject to impressment, being now beyond the limited age, and having, moreover, a protection.

“These facts I offered to substantiate,” continued the narrator, “and gave my card to the

leader of the party, but I was rudely thrust aside, and insulted with such gross abuse, that, in the irritation of the moment, I seized and struck the fellow who was dragging off his prisoner. One of his comrades instantly tripped up my heels, and I must have fallen with such violence against the wall of the house as to have stunned myself, for I have no recollection of what subsequently occurred. I have been an invalid lately, and I may perhaps have fainted away, but at all events I feel no other immediate inconvenience than a somewhat painful contusion at the back of my head, which is but a small punishment for so great an act of folly."

"I am surprised, indeed," said Mary, "that, being single-handed, and an invalid, you should have ventured to attack such a crew of ruffians."

"I have always considered impressment as an outrage the more cruel and unwarrantable

because it often falls upon the industrious and the friendless ; and I could not command myself when I saw them dragging away old Edwards, an honest man, and the father of a family, (whom, even by their own lawless law, they had no right to touch) as if he had been the basest criminal. However, I was doubly wrong. I should not have put myself into a passion, and still less should I have used violence. By an application in the proper quarter, I have no doubt I shall get him released, and methinks I have already strength enough to set about it. Not a moment shall be lost."

So saying, he made an effort to rise, but it proved too much for his strength, and he again sunk back upon the sofa.

"Let me entreat you, sir," said Mary, with an impressive earnestness, "not to attempt to move, in your present precarious state. Until the arrival of the surgeon, for whom I sent

some time ago, you must really allow us to consider you our prisoner."

"A thousand thanks for your kindness and forethought," said the patient, smiling; "and as to the captivity with which you menace me, I should not quickly wish to terminate it, were I not most anxious to procure the enlargement of Edwards, as well as apprehensive that my presence here may prove inconvenient."

Mary had just requested him to dismiss all fears upon the latter account, when the surgeon was announced, and she rejoined Helen, her usually sedate mood being exchanged for one of the liveliest animation, as she sang the praises of their temporary inmate. "What benevolence! what heroism!" she exclaimed, "to attack a whole pressgang in order to liberate a poor artisan, whom they were unjustly tearing away from his family!"

"Fool-hardiness might be a more appropriate term," observed Helen.

“Perhaps so, but I admire it nevertheless. When I consider his generous motive, I must applaud his temerity, reckless and uncontrollable as it was. I like the man who cannot witness an oppressive and illegal act without a burst of indignation, even though it may hurry him beyond the bounds of prudence.”

“I can easily fancy that you like the man,” said Helen, archly; “your looks and manner would have told me as much; but you go too far when you would vindicate the foolish desperation which he himself has condemned.”

“At all events,” replied Mary, blushing, “the candour with which he avows his fault should atone for it; and one may easily forgive a man for being a little too brave in a good cause.”

“Oh! I admit Mr. Barlow’s intrepidity, and only regret that it should be so badly seconded by his personal powers, and that he does not

possess the good looks as well as the valour of a hero of romance.”

“He told us that he had been an invalid, which, in conjunction with his recent accident, might well account for his paleness. But his countenance expresses intelligence and amiability. What more would you require?”

“Nay, *I* require nothing; but he seems to combine all the good qualities that *you* desiderate, since you are equally pleased with his lack of colour and his superfluity of rashness.”

Mary, who recurred in thought to the marked partiality of her friend, when Alfred Hunter had been vilipended, might easily have retaliated this raillery; but she never imitated the playful sallies of Helen, never indulged in a malicious pleasantry, never trifled with the feelings of others, even in joke, laying it down as a maxim that to give pain of any sort, and especially to one's friends, is equally inde-

fensible, whether it be done in sport or in earnest.

She made no reply, therefore, to Helen's *badinage*, except by her blushes, and was by no means sorry when their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of her father, especially as he came to announce the opinion of the surgeon that Mr. Barlow had received no serious injury, although the delicate state of his health required precautions with which a more robust subject might have dispensed.

"He has been bled," continued Lomax, "and as he seems much more anxious about the impressed man than himself, and insists on taking legal steps for reclaiming him, before he is sent on board the tender, I have promised that our carriage shall convey him to Deptford, where his attorney resides, if he will only keep himself perfectly quiet for another half hour. He will afterwards proceed immediately to his father's, where he will of course receive

every attention, for, if I mistake not, he is an only son. I have often heard our neighbours speak of Mr. Barlow, the shipbuilder, as a very wealthy as well as worthy man."

"I hope the love at first sight will prove reciprocal," whispered Helen to her friend, "for the only son of a worthy and wealthy shipbuilder is a conquest not to be despised in these lover-less times. You will now have a choice of admirers—one who attacks press-gangs like a Don Quixote, and another who runs away from them like a Sancho Panza—while I, happy I, shall now stand a chance of getting the latter—alias, Mr. Jasper Pike—back again!"

Helen returned to Eagle Wharf, eager to relate to Rose Mayhew all that she had heard, seen, and encountered, during her absence, a recital which, with her habitual propensity to the ridiculous, she occasionally broadened into burlesque and caricature, though there was

always a basis of truth in her ludicrous perversions. In recounting Mrs. Skinner's imputations upon Alfred Hunter, Rose, who was evidently interested in the subject, insisted upon the cruelty of crediting insinuations totally unsupported by proof; and opposed with such success the affectionate praises of his mother and sister, the most competent judges of his character and conduct, to the malignant inuendoes of his calumniator, who was personally unacquainted with him, that Helen, driven in succession from all her assumed positions, and baffled in all her sham charges, gave up the contest, and retreated to her own room, feeling a pique against Rose which she could not subdue, although she acknowledged its injustice. No wonder that she was unable to explain her sensations, for it was the first time that her bosom had been disturbed by the pangs of jealousy.

The novelty and the painfulness of her sen-

sations—for she could not bear to harbour one unkindly feeling towards her gentle and amiable friend—induced her, in the solitude of her own chamber, to analyse the cause of her emotions. “How comes it,” she demanded of herself, “that, believing Hunter to be innocent, or at least only responsible for a few venial indiscretions, I pretended to think him guilty of every thing laid to his charge, unless it were to hoodwink Rose, and to conceal my real predilection in his favour? Why was I angry with her for the generous ardour with which she undertook his defence, except from an unworthy jealousy, of which, momentary as it was, I had hoped myself to be incapable? And why, after all, am I secretly pleased at the success of her exculpation? Alas! I fear there is but one answer to these questions—because I have a secret regard for her client. Well! I plead guilty—I confess the fact—and what then? By a combination of circumstances,

that give interest to his character, and by the display of endowments and accomplishments, little in accordance with his humble situation, Mr. Hunter has surprised my feelings into a compassion for his fate — into a pity on account of his family. And is not this sympathy with the unfortunate not only natural but laudable? His appearance is certainly exceedingly striking, and some of his good qualities may have excited my admiration; but I am not conscious of any leaning towards him beyond this excusable partiality; I am not aware of any regard that I cannot control and subdue just as I may think fit. As to my falling in love, and throwing myself away upon a wharf-clerk, the idea is too ridiculous. I am not likely, mad-cap as they used to call me, to commit any such gross impropriety, especially as I myself do not seem to have made the least impression upon the insensible creature, a fact which materially lowers my

estimate of him as to taste and discernment ! ”

In this half serious, half bantering strain, she reasoned with herself for some time, deciding at length that, as the novelty of finding so many unexpected recommendations in a clerk had been the principal cause of the predilection into which her feelings had been surprised, the most likely method of checking it was to take every opportunity of throwing herself into his society, until she could meet him with perfect indifference.

“ Familiarity,” thought Helen, “ breeds contempt ; and in a few weeks I have no doubt that I shall look upon Mr. Hunter—not with disdain, for he must always merit my respect on account of his misfortunes, but with scarcely more prepossession than I entertain for Mr. Jasper Pike, who, as an epitome of the take-care-of-number-one sort of people, may be considered my favourite aversion, my pet horror.”

Poor Helen's expedient for conquering her incipient regard by familiarizing herself with its object was a device that will never succeed, until steel can deprive the magnet of its attraction by frequency of collision. Circumstances were as favourable as she could wish for the full trial of the experiment.

Mrs. Bryant, anxious to make her stay at the Wharf as agreeable as possible, and never entertaining a moment's thought that her heiress niece could dream of attaching herself to "a poor creature who was completely down in the world, and had not one guinea to rub against another," frequently invited Hunter to spend the evening up stairs, a courtesy which he always eagerly accepted and gratefully acknowledged.

Helen and Rose were both equally anxious to draw forth the accomplishments of which they had received the first knowledge from his mother and sister; and, as their visitant was not less desirous to ingratiate himself with

his fair companions, and more especially with Rose, by whom he had been smitten at first sight, and who daily gained a stronger hold of his heart and his imagination, he readily lent himself to their views. His portfolio, which contained drawings still more beautiful than any they had yet seen, was submitted to their inspection ; and, while Helen played the piano, he frequently sang duets with her friend.

Rose Mayhew, a creature of the most susceptible temperament, who was all sensibility and enthusiasm, and who had already felt the profoundest commiseration for Hunter, on account of the humble state to which his reverses had doomed him, was not proof against the touching tenderness that glistened in his eyes and trembled in his voice, whenever he sang the sufferings of a hopeless and yet ineradicable passion. By that mysterious intuition, which enables lovers to develop each other's secret, while it is yet folded in the bud, and no breath

has blown it open, she felt assured that the sentiments he was thus fervently expressing found an echo in his innermost heart, while they awakened a sympathising chord in her own. She believed herself to be the cause of his impassioned inspiration, and the thrill of mingled pleasure and alarm that electrified her at this discovery carried with it the conviction that her concealed attachment was already secretly reciprocated.

Sanguine and romantic as she was, and little conversant, moreover, with the ways of the world, she did not for a moment dream of encouraging the passion that had stolen thus imperceptibly into her bosom, even although she more than suspected it to be reciprocated. She herself was not only penniless, but unqualified for procuring her subsistence in any capacity except as a governess, from which employment her marriage would of course instantly preclude her. Hunter was a bad manager, thoughtless,

improvident, speculative, charges so often brought against him both by Mr. and Mrs. Bryant, and so feebly rebutted, that she could scarcely doubt their truth. By marrying him under such circumstances, she should only aggravate the distress with which he was already contending, while she might not improbably occasion him to forfeit the favour of Mr. Bryant.

For a misplaced affection there is perhaps no effectual cure but absence, a remedy which poor Rose was so far from being enabled to apply, that she was brought, by a combination of untoward circumstances, into almost daily communication with the party whom she would most willingly have avoided.

Of the perpetual contest thus engendered with her feelings the effect soon became visible, for she was too delicate in her conformation, both mental and corporeal, to be able to sustain it with impunity. Her spirits and her health

sank beneath the effect. A wan hue succeeded to her clear olive-coloured complexion ; she lost all taste for her usual occupations ; unconscious sighs frequently escaped from her ; and, when rallied by Helen upon her dejection, she denied it with a faint and forced smile, little in accordance with her saddened heart. Often were her large earnest eyes fixed upon the ground, while her thoughts were wandering elsewhere ; and, when aroused from her reverie, she no longer shook aside the dark locks that shadowed her face, and looked laughing forth, like the sun from a disparted cloud, but sought some pretext for hastily quitting the apartment, in order to conceal the unbidden tear that was stealing down her cheek.

Nor was the experiment of Helen much more successful than that of her friend. Familiarity, she found, did not *always* breed contempt. On the contrary, the more she saw of Hunter, the greater became her admiration of his conver-

sational powers and of his various attainments. Much too quick-sighted, however, to be blind to his faults, she saw that he was wayward, irritable, and so inconsistent in his moods that she was sometimes puzzled to decide upon his real disposition.

In the hope of conquering her prepossession by setting it at variance with her judgment and her convictions, she dwelt on the more discreditable imputations levelled against him by Mrs. Skinner, which, though they were doubtless coloured by her malice, had never been formally disproved, and might, after all, be built upon a basis of truth. Her logic convinced her judgment better than her heart.

Fully admitting his errors, she had the mortification of finding that she still loved a man whom she could not altogether esteem, and who had not afforded her the smallest intimation of reciprocating her attachment. Her pride was wounded at the discovery ; she was indignant

at her inability to eradicate a feeling which she began to consider equally inexcusable and indelicate; but she was too strong-minded and vivacious to sink under this contest, like her timid and sensitive friend. Her mood was altered indeed, but it betrayed itself chiefly in the forced and artificial hilarity which she endeavoured to substitute for her failing spirits, and in an occasional peevishness and petulance towards others, engendered by her dissatisfaction with herself. Even Rose was not always excepted from her perverseness, although it was remarkable that at this juncture the two friends, by a sort of tacit compact, generally refrained from all allusion to the secret object of their joint attachment.

Nor was Hunter's situation a whit less trying and painful than that of his fair companions. As the talents and attractions of the winning, the fascinating, the irresistible Rose Mayhew received a daily development, he became more

irrecoverably enamoured, and at the same time more fully persuaded of the impossibility of their union. Not for worlds would he have made the gifted being, whom he thus admired with all the ardour of an enthusiastic temperament, the partner of his broken and desperate fortunes ; and he strove, therefore, most earnestly, though, as we have shown, unsuccessfully, to conceal from her the flame she had kindled in his bosom. He felt himself tied to a stake from which there was no escape, and the baiting to which his heart was exposed became manifest in his increased dejection, alternating with splenetic moods and a more frequent neglect of his official duties, which drew down upon him the quick reproaches of the vigilant Mr. Bryant, and occasioned their squabbles to be more numerous and sharp than ever.

Thus did the blind Deity appear to have visited Eagle Wharf, only that he might in-

dulge in his favourite pastime, and gratify his malice by getting up a game of cross-purposes, in which his victims, the more they strove to set themselves free, only became the more inextricably involved.

CHAPTER IV.

“First worship God ; he that forgets to pray
Bids not himself good morrow, nor good day.”

T. RANDOLPH.

“You seem very fond of reading,” said Helen one evening to Hunter, on his presenting a new publication which he had borrowed for the perusal of herself and her friend.

“Fond of it !” was the reply. “That is far too tame and cold a word to express the enthusiasm, the rapture, with which, after the grovelling and hateful labours of the day, my mind throws off the galling yoke of business, and rushes into the green pastures of literature. O Miss Owen ! you, who have ever enjoyed

the inestimable privilege of commanding your own time, and the still more precious power of suffering your unshackled thoughts to range at will ; you, to whom mental delights have been a daily pastime, of which the very frequency must, in some degree, have diminished the zest ; you can scarcely imagine how intense a passion they become to one who can only indulge in them at rare and stolen intervals ; one who has been conversant during the tedious day with nothing but dull or revolting material elements ; who has been disgusted by vegetating in the midst of vulgar and ignorant plodders, scarcely more congenial to his taste than the mercantile objects with which they are surrounded. To turn from such darkness and drudgery, and soar into the heaven of intellectual light and liberty ; to feel that your soul has spread its wings, and lifted you above the dull earth into a delicious and resplendent atmosphere of intelligence, wherein it may expatiate

without control ; to be conscious that you sit therein, like a throned Deity, Omnipotent and alone, wielding that mysterious power of thought, which can subjugate both time and space, and penetrate whatever it touches with an electric potency ; to conjure up a thousand visions of enchantment, and yet to entertain no fear that the stores of such magic delight will ever be exhausted ; this, this is a transport, a glory, an extacy, for which life has no parallel, and language has no echo.”

“ You describe it, as you have felt it—like a poet,” said Helen, “ and I can imagine your enjoyments, although the Muse has never touched me with her wand. Here is one, however, who, being a secret votary of Apollo, appears to have sympathized with you more deeply. ‘ See how our partner’s rapt ! ’ ”

She pointed to Rose, who, having intently fixed her eyes upon Hunter during his impassioned effusion, while a momentary flush lighted

up her cheek, and her expressive features played in delighted accordance with the sentiments she heard, still retained her look and posture, as if she had been transfixed by his accents.

“How? what? Were you speaking to me?” cried the abashed girl, starting from her reverie, shaking a dark veil of ringlets over her face, throwing down the long fringe of her eyes, and crossing her hands upon her bosom in blushing perturbation. “I was thinking of something else. I have been so strangely absent of late, but I quite agree with Mr. Hunter. Oh no! I mean with Helen. Were you not observing ——? Yes, your soul spread its wings, did it not?”

Attempting to recover her self-possession, the nervous girl brought on one of her fits of confusion, which she was increasing by her incoherent discourse, when Helen came to her rescue, by exclaiming to their companion:—

“Having so few hours for indulging your taste, you must almost grudge every minute of your spare time that is given to company.”

“Not where it combines the charms of intellect with those of pleasant and polished society, as in the present instance,” replied Hunter, bowing to Helen, though the feeling had been mainly awakened by the talents and attractions of her friend.

It was the first time that he had ever addressed to the former any thing like a personal compliment, and his manner of conveying it was at once so pointed and deferential, that it brought a passing blush to her cheek, and accelerated the pulsation of her heart during the remainder of their colloquy.

“The conversations,” continued Hunter, “with which I have been honoured, together with the musical and other amusements in which I have been allowed to participate since

the arrival of yourself and Miss Mayhew at Eagle Wharf, have been an unspeakable comfort to me, and would, indeed, have completely reconciled me to my lot, if certain considerations — not that I am presumptuous enough to imagine ——, mine is a very peculiar fate, and not less painful than peculiar.”

He stopped in evident embarrassment, and sighed deeply.

“When I sounded him as to his disposition for company,” thought Helen, “he evaded my question by a compliment. Another of Mrs. Skinner’s charges, and one of a much more grave nature, remains to be cleared up, and I am determined that he shall not elude it.”

With this view she continued :—“I presume, sir, that your Sundays are generally devoted to literature, for I have been informed that you rarely attend any place of public worship.”

“I am not much surprised at this charge,”

replied Hunter, with a slight reddening of the cheek, "for our neighbourhood is infested with a set of most illiberal and intolerant persons. Peace be with them, for they have need of it ! Some there are, as I now learn, who go to church, not so much that they may feel themselves in the presence of their Creator, as that they may pry around them, and note down the absence of their neighbours, for the purpose of circulating against them the most injurious aspersions. Most freely do I forgive them, but I cannot sympathize with their inquisitive and uncharitable devotion."

"Nor is it necessary," replied Helen. "Higher and holier motives might, nevertheless, attract you to some place of public worship, to say nothing of the duty and example that you owe to society."

"I am not, Miss Owen, one of those pharisaical formalists who are more anxious to be seen of men than approved of Heaven, and

I have withdrawn from Salem and Bethesda chapels, because the gloomy and intolerant doctrines of its preachers appear to me so eminently unchristian as even to desecrate the buildings that echo them. I cannot substitute bad dogmas for good works. I cannot bear to behold our noblest arts, and all the resources of wealth, lavished upon the walls of a sacred edifice, while its divine service may be delegated to a man of mean intellect and uncharitable heart. Surely, God, who gave all, deserves the best, and much more so in the mental than in the material offering : his house of prayer needs the enlightened understanding, and the benevolent feelings of the minister, rather than the sculptured stone, and the gilded decorations of the architect."

"There are many other places of worship," resumed Helen, "where your devotional feelings would derive warmth from the talents and fervour of the priest ; and you will, surely,

admit that the Sabbath ought not to pass over without some sort of religious observance."

"Certainly not. With me, indeed, it could not so pass, even if I had no sacred fane to which I could betake myself, for, never, never do I thrill with a more heartfelt piety, than in the God-built temple of Nature, where the sunbeams play around me, like angels of light fresh from heaven, their eyes twinkling in the flowers, their breath fragrant in the breeze, their voices blending in faint murmurs with the hymn of the bees and the chant of the birds."

"Am I to infer, then, that, because you have so keen a sense of solitary devotion, you do not recognize the importance of public worship?"

"You are to draw no such conclusion from what I have said. I myself have, perhaps, less occasion than others to go to church, for the church comes to me, wherever I may be wandering; but the multitude, I am well aware,

do not share these feelings. Unimaginative and unreflecting, they require some worship that shall address itself to their senses, and it may be doubted whether they would not quickly lose every sentiment of religion, unless it were regularly stamped upon their minds by a participation in the stated observances and solemn forms of public Sabbath service. With this conviction I feel that the duty of social is still more imperative than that of private worship; the community has a claim upon every individual, however humble, for the benefit of his example; and on these accounts I have almost always, I wish I could say invariably, attended divine service on the Sunday. In such indiscriminate meetings, the wealthy and the powerful, too apt to become exclusive and arrogant, learn humility and benevolence: after such elevating communion, the peasant—I am now about to quote one of my favourite writers — ‘ rises from his knees, and feels himself a man.

He learns philosophy without its pride, and a spirit of liberty without its turbulence. Every time social worship is celebrated, it includes a virtual declaration of the rights of man.''' *

Helen was about to make some observation in reply, when the harsh voice of Bryant, as he abruptly entered the room, grated upon her ear, like the dissonance of a broken wire in a piano, and the whole party instantly became silent. Hunter, indeed, rarely spoke in his presence, and his companions were too much affected by what they had just heard, to start any other subject.

Bryant, however, though he guessed by their silence and their looks that his appearance was not particularly acceptable, stood upon no ceremony, but demanded of his clerk in peremptory language, and with a frown of displeasure, why he had not executed the orders given to him in the morning.

* Mrs. Barbauld's Works, vol. ii. p. 448.

Indignant at being thus sternly catechized before his fair friends, Hunter's countenance immediately assumed an expression of defiance; an angry altercation ensued, and the parties presently quitted the room, wrangling loudly together.

"Well," exclaimed Helen, deviating from the reserve which had existed between the friends for some time past on the subject of Hunter, "what think you of our *çi-devant* knight of the rueful visage? Mrs. Skinner had a better basis than usual for her scandal, when she accused him of having latterly been an habitual absentee from chapel. And, after the specimen we have just had of his irritability and rudeness, for he bolted out of the room in fierce altercation, and without noticing either you or me, what would be your verdict as to his alleged ill-nature?"

"How should he be free from inconsistencies and even faults," replied Rose, "for

I do not think any positive vices have yet been brought home to him, when circumstances have thrown him into so false a position, and he is so utterly out of his element ! In his impatience, he frets for a more appropriate sphere, even as the hart panteth for the water brooks. The caged eagle and the imprisoned lion are fierce, intractable, and unhappy : but we think not the worse of them because they cannot reconcile themselves to their unworthy doom."

"I forgot that you were his champion, and I know not where he could have found a more able and eager one."

"I am not Mr. Hunter's champion," replied Rose, with a slight air of reserve ; "nor am I conscious of being eager, though I may be earnest. I merely spoke my convictions."

"You need not have told me you were in earnest ; I see it in your looks and tones. But, say, my grave, sweet, and beautiful little ad-

vocate, what are your convictions as to your client's *etourderie* at the beginning of our colloquy, when, with confusion and hesitation, he said that he should be completely reconciled to his lot except for certain considerations, which he left unexplained : and stammered about his not being so presumptuous as to imagine—something or other which he very provokingly left *us* to imagine? Now, if I were half so poetical and fanciful as he is, I could almost have dreamed from his compliments, and the tenderness of his looks and tones, that the man was actually in love with me. Ha ! ha ! ha ! only it would be really too ridiculous.”

“I see nothing ridiculous in the supposition,” faltered Rose. “Mr. Hunter is a gentleman by birth and education, and, were I in his situation, I am sure I could not have helped falling in love with you.”

“But, were you in mine, dear Rose, could *you* fall in love with *him* ?”

“Nay, Helen, how can I enter into your feelings? I cannot tell—no—yes—in love—Mr. Hunter—a gentleman—do not ask *me*. Dear! dear! what *am* I saying?”

“My sweet Rose!” exclaimed her friend, in a tone of anxious affection, “what *can* be the matter with you? You tremble all over, and look as pale as a ghost. Positively you must yield to the wishes I have more than once expressed, and take medical advice, for both your health and spirits have been decidedly failing you for some time past.”

“No, no,” murmured Rose, making an effort to recover herself; “I felt faint for a moment—perhaps the altercation between Mr. Hunter and Mr. Bryant had a little frightened me, but I am quite—quite well, now—and very—very happy.”

As she pronounced these words, the poor girl burst into tears, and hurried out of the room, while her friend sought Mrs. Bryant to

request that a physician might be summoned, to decide upon the nature of her complaint and suggest the proper remedies.

CHAPTER V.

“There’s one yonder, and carried to prison, was worth five thousand of you all.”

SHAKSPEARE.

A FEW days after this conversation, as Helen and Rose were sitting together, a timid knock at the door was heard, and the servant entered to announce Mrs. Hunter, who stole into the room with a significant smile upon her features, exclaiming, as she glanced round the apartment, —“What ! nobody else here ? neither Mr. nor Mrs. Bryant ? Well, I am glad of it, for when one has a secret that one particularly wishes to keep, I do think the fewer that one tells it to the better, especially if you can-

not depend upon them — don't you, Miss Owen?"

"That is a proposition upon which I would not venture to decide without due deliberation," said Helen, in her bantering strain; "but upon the first blush of the question, I should feel *rather* inclined to agree with you."

"No doubt, my dear; but I don't know why I should be so anxious to keep my little discovery a secret, only I feared the mention of it might displease Mr. or Mrs. Bryant, who have no great turn that way, and I don't want them to have any excuse for fresh quarrels with dear Alfred, as they are always sneering and girding at him for his giving up his time to such pursuits. I believe I stated that neither of them have any great turn that way themselves."

"You did," said Helen; "but you omitted to mention what way."

"Did I? only think of my being so thoughtless! The fact is, I have made a little dis-

covery about dear Alfred, who has lately, I find, been returning to his old loves, and has been secretly courting — la, Miss Mayhew, how the colour flushes up into your face, and how beautiful it makes you look! what a pity you hav'n't always got such a nice colour, instead of being so pale and sickly!”

“I do not exactly see what my friend's complexion can have to do with Mr. Hunter's courtship,” said Helen, assuming an air of indifference, though she was all impatience for the expected disclosure.

“No more do I, especially as I had only discovered that he had been secretly courting the Muse. You know I told you he was a poet, although he has written little or nothing since our troubles, and, Heaven knows, they have been enough to — la! there's mackarel crying three a-shilling; well, that's not dear! However, I must tell you the story. I was washing out his neckcloths early this morn-

ing, not so much to save the expense, but Harriet and I can get them up so much better than the laundress, and Alfred ties his so well and so genteelly, and it makes such a difference in a man's appearance, though Alfred, I am proud to say, *always* looks like a gentleman—Well, I was thinking of my dear boy, and of the degrading occupation to which he was reduced, so different from what he had a right to expect, when the tears stole down my cheeks, without my knowing it, and fell into the tub, and it did appear to me so very ridiculous that they should be wasted in that way, by dropping into the soapsuds, that I could not help bursting into a fit of laughter, though I believe I was half crying all the time. So Harriet came running in to know what was the matter, for God knows I hardly ever laugh now, though I was once merry enough; and then she told me that two strangers had called for Alfred immediately after breakfast, and he

had gone out with them ; so I went into his room to set it to rights, for when he is absent, it's a comfort to me to be always doing something or other for him, and there upon the table what should I see but—la, what a beautiful collar, Miss Owen !—did you work it yourself?—such a neat little sprig all round the border !—Let me see—where was I ? ”

“ You had just got out of the washing-tub, and we left you on the table,” said Helen.

“ Ay, so I was ; well, what *should* I discover on the table but this paper, which I snatched up, and then ran down stairs to speak to Mrs. Tibbs, the landlady, about oiling the jack, it does make such a horrid creaking, and if there is one noise I hate more than another, it is ”—

“ But the paper ? ” interposed both her auditors simultaneously—“ what did it contain ? ”

“ Why, my dears, some verses, which I will read to you, though Alfred evidently left them unfinished, and I dare say will make them much

prettier when he comes to polish them up. I can't imagine, for my part, how he could think of it all, and make the lines rhyme together, which I am sure I could never do for the life of me."

The old lady then adjusted her spectacles, and, with an apprehensiveness and propriety, much more correct than could have been anticipated from the rambling silliness of her discourse, read a devotional effusion of considerable length.

"Isn't it beautiful?" asked the delighted mother, at its conclusion.—"And only think of poor Alfred, who can write such nice verses, all rhyming at the end, being compelled to make entries all day long in a stupid journal and ledger, where there isn't a single rhyme; or else to stand beside the great scales, and take down the weights of nasty casks of tallow and turpentine!"

"I admire Mr. Hunter's poetry," said Helen,

“and I sincerely rejoice that he has found so delightful a solace in the midst of his many trials.”

“Well, now, that’s very kind of you, dear Miss Owen, and, for my part, I believe it was meant by Heaven that there should be a consolation of some sort under all our afflictions. Now, for instance, they have just raised the price of candles, but then the days are getting longer, and we shan’t burn so many, which is all owing to the Providence that watches over us.”

“I quite agree with you that every sorrow has its solace,” said Helen, whose sympathy and kindlier feelings had subdued, for the moment, all her propensity to joking. “Our reverses often produce blessings, as the night brings forth the morning ; and I sincerely hope that you and your family will soon emerge from beneath your present cloud, into brighter and better days.”

“Thank you, thank you, my sweet Miss

Owen. La ! how prettily that was expressed ! I declare you speak almost as well as Alfred, and I'm sure that's a compliment. Dear ! dear ! I am so unused to cheering looks and cordial good wishes, that they quite go to my heart ; but lack-a-day ! I know not from what quarter we are to expect any improvement of our fate, for we have no relations except the Bryants, and we cannot expect them to do more for us than they have done already. I am very grateful, but I do wish they wouldn't quarrel with Alfred. I wonder, by the bye, where he *can* be gone to with those strangers, for he has not been to the counting-house this morning, and there goes the twelve o'clock bell, at the Linseed Mills !" With these words she arose to take her departure, reclaiming the verses from Rose, who, during the conversation, had been reading them over a second time.

The silence, not totally free from embarrass-

ment, which continued for some minutes after Mrs. Hunter had quitted the room, was broken by Helen's exclaiming—"I believe you were right, my darling Rose de Meaux! Our knight of the quill may have peculiar notions, but irreligious he is not; and so far the puritanical Mrs. Skinner stands convicted, for the five hundredth time, of most uncharitable detraction. These verses have evidently been drawn forth by our late conversation on the subject."

"I never believed the charge," said Rose, "for I knew Mr. Hunter to be a man of talent and a poet, both of which I consider irreconcilable with a want of devotion. He seems, moreover, if his mother and sister may be credited, to be correct in his conduct, and amiable in his affections, which is, in fact, to be practically pious."

"The testimony of his family is rather creditable to themselves than to him," said

Helen, who, somehow or other, always spoke the most disparagingly of Hunter, when she secretly felt the most prepossessed in his favour. "Then you must recollect, dear Rose, that Mrs. Skinner's further charges of his addiction to low company, and his occasional deep potations, remain yet to be cleared up."

"I have no doubt they are quite as false as his imputed irreligion," replied Rose, as she quitted the room, anxious to lose no time in writing down the verses which she had partly committed to memory.

"My friend seems determined to vindicate him upon every occasion," whispered Helen to herself. "This is ridiculous enough; but, judging all the world by her own pure and benevolent heart, she cannot be brought to harbour an unfavourable impression of any one. After all, what *can* it signify to *me* whether the man be a Jonathan Wild or a Sir

Charles Grandison? What's he to Hecuba or Hecuba to him? Nothing. Wherefore, as nothing can come of nothing, I will waste no more time upon the subject, but resume my book."

Her eyes were accordingly fixed upon the page, but her thoughts, notwithstanding her recent decision as to the nullity of the inquiry, still continued to balance the pros and cons of Hunter's character, in which occupation she had remained about half an hour, without turning over a single leaf, when the door was abruptly thrown open, and Mrs. Hunter rushed into the room, her usually placid face flushed with heat and agitation, and discoloured with tears.

"Mr. Bryant! where *is* Mr. Bryant?" she exclaimed, panting for breath and looking wildly round the room.

"He is gone out," said Helen; "he and my aunt crossed the river early this morning to

visit some friends on the opposite bank. But you tremble ; my dear madam, pray sit down—what has disturbed you thus ?”

“O, Miss Owen ! I am a wretched, lost woman !” cried the visitant, throwing herself into a chair. “What will become of me ? what will become of poor Harriet ? I shall never hold up my head again — My son, my dear son ! he was our sole support—he was our only—”

Unable to complete the sentence, she buried her face in her hands, and, while the fresh-gushing tears trickled through her fingers, swayed her head backwards and forwards in an agony of grief.

“What can possibly have happened ?” demanded Helen, her voice and look attesting the agitated state of her feelings.

“The worst, the worst, the very worst that *could* have happened — my precious, my kind-hearted boy ! I have lost—I have lost my dear Alfred.”

“Gracious Heaven!” ejaculated Helen, with a cry of terror and amazement, “I saw him only yesterday in perfect health.”

“In health!” repeated the mother, looking up at the exclamation she had heard; “well, so he is now, I hope and trust; only they have arrested him for debt and thrown him into prison, and, I know not, poor as we all are, how he is ever to be got out again. Those horrid men, with whom he went away so early this morning, were bailiffs, and he wouldn’t mention it for fear of alarming us, especially as he hoped to get assistance from a friend, in which he has been disappointed. But, la! Miss Owen, what *is* the matter with you? How your colour comes and goes, and how you tremble and pant for breath, just as little Miss Mayhew did, when I talked of Alfred’s courting the Muse. I fear I must have frightened you out of your wits, and no wonder, for I am almost scared out of my own. My poor, dear Alfred!

Only to think of his being dragged to prison when I had got a roast duck too for dinner, which is his favourite dish ! Was there ever any thing so cruel ? ”

Helen, who had sunk into a chair, made an effort to recover herself, though her voice was still tremulous with emotion as she said, “ You did indeed alarm me ; your words and your deep distress led me to suppose that some fatal accident had occurred, and my heart, which had leaped to my mouth, feels quite relieved now I find that it is nothing but Mr. Hunter’s arrest which has thus flurried you.”

“ Nothing but Alfred’s arrest ! ” exclaimed the mother, reproachfully, while her tears were checked by a momentary feeling of indignation ; “ do you call that nothing ? It is every thing to us ! Such a dear, dutiful son ! ”

As the good lady wept with more bitterness than ever at the thought of her accumulated misfortunes, Helen endeavoured to console her

by suggesting that Mr. Bryant would doubtless exert himself to procure her son's discharge.

"That is what I came to petition for," cried the mother; "but I have no hope of succeeding, none whatever. Alfred is already indebted to him for an advance of salary; they have just had a fresh quarrel together; and Mr. Bryant warned both him and me, only a few days ago, that, if he could not manage to live within his income, he should send him trooping; we have no other friends in the world, and as to *my* raising eighty pounds—"

"Eighty pounds!" interposed Helen; "is *that* the whole amount of the debt for which he has been arrested?"

"Yes; but we are as unable to pay it as if it had been a thousand."

Overcome by surprise and pleasure at this intelligence, for she had anticipated some heavy sum, Helen could not suppress a laugh of joy,

which, though it was half hysterical, gave great offence to her companion, who exclaimed reproachfully, "Ah, Miss Owen ! it is easy for them to laugh who have never known trouble, and have got no sons. Prosperity, they say, hardens the heart, but I never thought *you* could be unfeeling enough to ridicule my misfortunes."

"Heaven forbid that I should do so !" said Helen, taking her hand, and affectionately pressing it—"pray forgive my involuntary emotion, which sprang from my delight at thinking how soon and how easily I can extricate you from all your troubles."

"Me—me ! I care not for myself : it is my dear Alfred whom I want to extricate."

"Well ; and his liberation will relieve you, will it not, from all your troubles ? Harkye, my dear Mrs. Hunter ! although I am not yet of age, and have not, therefore, any control over my fortune, my allowance, since the death

of my father, has always been so liberal that it has enabled me to make a purse of my own. In this writing-desk I have a bank-note of one hundred pounds which I was just about to add to my little separate investment, but which I shall think a thousand times better bestowed, if you will do me the favour of accepting it. You can repay me, you know, at some future day, when you get a prize in the lottery, for Mr. Hunter, if I mistake not, occasionally tries his fortune in that way."

With these words she unlocked the desk, and handed over the bank-note to her companion, who, during the process, looked on in a silent and amazed bewilderment, as if she distrusted the evidence of her senses. When, however, her doubts were dispelled, she melted into tears of gratitude, and sobbed in a broken voice, "God bless you! God bless you, dear Miss Owen! feel my heart — *that* must thank you, for I can scarcely speak—I am almost choked."

After a brief interval, during which she continued to gaze wistfully at the note, with the tears glistening in her eyes, she added, "And yet I ought not to take this money without knowing how I am to repay it. Alfred, it is true, is constantly speculating in the Lottery, which is one cause of his present embarrassment; but it is not for himself — it is all for me and Harriet, in the hope of placing us in a more comfortable situation. But, alas ! alas ! he is always unfortunate—there is no luck for any of our family ; we shall never be enabled to get out of your debt."

"Then do me the favour to accept this trifle as a little token of friendship," said Helen, who had only alluded to repayment from motives of delicacy, although her simple-hearted visitant had taken her words in a literal sense.

"That I will !" exclaimed Mrs. Hunter, throwing her arms round her neck and kissing her. "I don't mind taking it from you, because

I should have delighted in giving it to you ; and though I cannot express my gratitude, my dear Alfred, who is as eloquent as he is warm-hearted, will hurry hither, I am sure, the moment he is at liberty, to offer—”

“Nay, nay,” interrupted Helen, blushing, “I forgot to make one positive stipulation. This little transaction must remain a secret between you and me. It must be concealed from every body, and particularly from Mr. Hunter.”

“Well, my dear Miss Owen ! if you will have it so, I must obey, and indeed I shall be glad to hide it from Mr. Bryant, for fear of the consequences. They quarrel enough, as it is ; but I am sure it cannot be Alfred’s fault, for he is the kindest creature in the world. Dear ! dear ! what shall I say to account for his absence ?”

“You had better lose no time in effecting his liberation,” observed Helen.

“Not a moment, not a moment,” cried the mother, bustling up, wiping her eyes, and gathering her shawl around her, as she added, “I will take a boat instantly, and see the lawyer. Dear ! dear ! I am so happy, and my heart is beating at *such* a rate ! I hope Harriet won’t forget to feed Tabby, and the Pug, and to water the geranium, and to have the duck taken up ; I can’t be every where at once. How Alfred *will* stare at the sight of the hundred pound note ! God bless you once more, dear Miss Owen ! I hope we shall *all* pray for you to-night ;” and with these words she hurried away, too much wrapt in her own thoughts to attend to Helen’s reiterated injunctions of secrecy.

CHAPTER VI.

“—————Beauty, pomp,
With every sensuality our giddiness
Doth frame an idol—are inconstant friends,
When any troubled passion makes us halt
On the unguarded castle of the mind.”

SEVERAL trifling circumstances, which in their minuteness would have escaped the notice of a male eye, convinced Helen that Mary Lomax had been strongly prepossessed, even at their first interview, in favour of Evelyn Barlow, and the result quickly proved the truth of her conclusions. Not having the same clue, however, to the feelings of the other sex, nor the same opportunities of observation, she did not so soon detect that the predilection was reciprocal, and that a mutual at-

tachment had sprung up between them, of which the progress was much more rapid than might have been anticipated from the diffident character of both parties.

Women, who may be timid without reproach, are more especially prone to admire the display of an opposite quality in those men whose appearance and conformation seem hardly compatible with mental energy and a daring hardihood. Barlow was an instance of this combination; he possessed, moreover, a singular suavity and gentleness of demeanour, a melodious, but earnest and impressive voice, together with a retiring, unobtrusive, manner, not often to be encountered in the young men of the present school.

To Mary this blending of the manly in spirit with a tincture of the feminine in feeling and deportment seemed an union of the best qualities peculiar to either sex, which she admired for its rarity, and esteemed for its worth,

especially when subsequent inquiries confirmed all her predilections. As it has been stated that she herself, beneath a sedate and almost grave exterior, possessed a profound susceptibility, it will excite no surprise that, when the hitherto-sealed fountain of her affections had found a channel, it should be rapid and exuberant in its flow. The almost daily visits of Barlow, his deferential demeanour, for true love ever contemplates its object with a feeling that approaches to religious homage, and, above all, the silent courtship of his eyes, soon convinced her of his attachment ; nor, while her heart fully responded to the tenderness she had inspired, was she insensible to the peculiar eligibility of the match, should he make a regular declaration of love. Upon almost every subject there existed between them a perfect conformity of opinion ; his good qualities were admitted by all ; his family were respectable and wealthy ; and their residence,

which was at an easy distance, would scarcely interfere with the discharge of her filial duties, should she be called upon to preside over an establishment of her own in so near a neighbourhood.

Cypress House, with its grandeur and its gloom, its alternations of intemperate excess, moody melancholy, and fierce strife between her parents, had become so thoroughly distasteful to her, that nothing could have reconciled her to her lot, but a sense of duty and an innate strength of mind. Abundant, therefore, and cogent, were the reasons for wishing to quit her present abode, while she had no countervailing motive for attaching her to it, except her affection for her brother Benjamin, whose health, which at first appeared to have been strengthened by the change of air, had again begun to give way. She reflected, however, that, if she became a resident in the immediate vicinity, she would still be enabled to

see him as often as she wished. Her mother, whatever might be her state of mind, never relaxed for a single instant her watchful and anxious ministrings to her darling boy ; nor did Mary, although she noticed his increasing debility, imagine him to be affected with any very serious malady.

Barlow's parents, who had called at Cypress House to return thanks for the attentions lavished upon him, and who had enjoyed various subsequent opportunities of becoming better acquainted with Mary, were scarcely less pleased with her than their son, and eagerly gave their assent to his soliciting her hand in marriage. His constitutional diffidence would not allow him to propose to her in a personal interview ; he made his offer, therefore, in a letter, worded with a characteristic frankness and fervour ; and Mary, who was equally superior to the affected coyness of the prude, and the silly caprices of the coquette,

accepted it in a brief and simple reply, which, having been previously submitted to the inspection of her father and mother, had met their entire and delighted concurrence.

“What say you now, Joel?” demanded Mrs. Lomax, who, as a set-off against the manifold annoyances and miseries entailed upon themselves by their joint crime, delighted to have an opportunity of dwelling upon its incalculable advantages to their children — “What say you now? Were we not wise to do *the deed*? It is doubtful whether we should even have saved the life of our darling Benjamin, and mine is wrapped up in his, had he not been enabled to command all the advantages of inoccupation, and the luxuries of wealth, besides having a physician in almost daily attendance upon him. But for *the deed*, for which you are mainly indebted to me, we must have seen our angel boy, spite of his delicate

health, condemned to some hateful drudgery, not less miserable, humiliating, and noxious, than that from which you yourself have been redeemed. We must have endured the anguish, the indescribable torture, of seeing him pining and wasting away before our eyes, knowing that toil and confinement were accelerating his death, and yet totally without the means of preventing so cruel, so heart-withering, a sacrifice."

"Very true, very true," mumbled the husband; whose senses were often muddled, even in the morning, from the depth of his overnight's potations.

"And our dear Mary," resumed the wife — "but for *the deed*, what would have been her fate? Of her marriage there would not have been the smallest chance, unless she had chosen to steep herself to the lips in poverty and degradation, by accepting the dirty hand of some low mechanic. No, she must have worn out

her eyes as a sempstress, or have continued to starve upon the paltry pittance which she was sometimes enabled to pick up by copying music for the shops ; whereas she will now be united to a gentleman of fortune — the object of her fond attachment ; she will occupy a handsome house, ride in her own carriage, dwell in our immediate vicinity, and thus afford us not only the solace of her society, but the delight of witnessing her happiness.”

The husband groaned, as he exclaimed with a reproachful look, “She will never witness our’s—not mine, at least.”

“Because you are a miserable hypochondriac, and a cowardly self-tormentor. Would you have been happier, think you, had you not done the deed? Your breaking health and your unsteady hand were daily incapacitating you more and more for your situation of a clerk ; and to what would you have betaken yourself after the death of Hoffman, and the

expenditure of his pitiful legacy? Old, infirm, and useless, you must have begged your bread in the public streets, unless you had thought fit to accompany your family to the Poor House."

"Perhaps so ; but I should not have been miserable and half mad ; I should not have been beset with terrors in the day, and haunted with ghastly visions at night that scare me from my sleep ; I should not have found life a burden, and yet have been afraid to die."

"What so dastardly a spirit as your's might have found or imagined, I cannot undertake to determine : I only know that you would *not* have found wealth, station, respect, equipage, sumptuous dinners, and rare wines, all of which you at present enjoy."

"No such thing, Jane ; I use them, but I do not enjoy them ; I enjoy nothing. Nature never meant me to be a guilty man, for I have not a heart of iron in my bosom. Had I known

what it was to be a criminal, a felon, I would have laid down my life at once, rather than live as I do now in the perpetual, the horrible dread of detection and the gallows. Oh, that appalling scene at the Old Bailey ! It pursues me—it stands before me whichever way I look ; if I shut my eyes I still distinctly see it ; and in my dreams I feel the accursed halter suffocating and throttling me, and undergo an almost nightly execution.”

“ What ! have you not yet dismissed that silly nightmare from your thoughts ? I should have supposed that the utter groundlessness of your past terrors would have prevented their recurrence. Which of your idle apprehensions has been confirmed ? Not a single one. Who comes forward to accuse us, or to dispute our claim to the fine fortune which we have every reason to presume we shall transmit undisputed to our dear children ? Nobody. Consider how many months have now elapsed, and no proceedings

have been instituted. Of Edward Ruddock we hear nothing. Had he intended to challenge our right, he would have been here long ago. He has probably been killed by the pestilential climate of South America ; and, as to your beleaguering scarecrow, the phantom of a heated and terrified imagination, the vision of the area, and the tall thin gentleman, ——."

"Jane ! Jane ! for Heaven's sake, make no allusion to that terrible man. Too often already is he conjured up before me. Why, why will you not remove the picture that hangs over the fire-place in the dining-room ? I have spoken of it before, and would have done it myself, but that I feared to approach it."

"What ! the fine painting of Satan after the Fall ? How does it offend you ?"

"Its eyes are like those of the mysterious stranger whom I *last* saw at the Old Bailey. They glare at me menacingly, they are fixed upon me wherever I stand ; and sometimes me-

thinks the frightful figure brandishes its spear, leaps from its frame, and chases me round the room."

"Ay, this is the phantasmagoria seen through the fumes of wine ; this is one of your after-dinner visions. If you would not stupify yourself by intoxication, Satan would remain quietly in his frame. However, the picture shall be instantly removed."

"Thank you, thank you," exclaimed Lomax, who seemed to feel as if he had been relieved from one of his spectral enemies.

"Now listen to me attentively," resumed the wife. "Mr. Barlow and his family are likely to become frequent visitants at Cypress House during the courtship of Evelyn and Mary. Let them not, I implore you, observe any thing that can dissatisfy them with the match, and still less prompt them to break it off. For the present, let our bickerings and wranglings be suspended; they are always vain and dangerous,

and now they would be more especially mischievous, since few people like to connect themselves with a disunited family ; and Evelyn Barlow, if I mistake not, conceals much penetration beneath a shy and unobservant manner. Whatever may be our own present feelings or future doom, let us but secure, by this most advantageous marriage, the happiness of our dear Mary, who is ardently attached to Evelyn Barlow, and we shall be so far independent of fate; we shall not, at all events, have perpetrated a crime in vain."

There was no hypocrisy in this speech of Mrs. Lomax, who really felt what she said. Benjamin was her darling child ; but her maternal feelings towards Mary, though sometimes interrupted, and never extended to her in their fair proportion, were not by any means obliterated ; and, notwithstanding the occasional harshness with which she had recently treated her, she admired the filial forbearance with

which she submitted to parental partiality and injustice. The father's morbid state of mind made him a party to this maltreatment ; but he both loved and respected his daughter, and his voice trembled with deep emotion, as he said, in reply to his wife's admonition : — “ Dear, dear Mary ! there is not a better girl breathing. It will, indeed, be a great consolation to know that the fatal deed has at least secured *her* happiness, and I would not for worlds do any thing that should blight her present prospects.”

“ Then moderate, I beseech you, your perilous potations, for, when you are overcome with wine, you know not what you say or do. Your rambling discourse must fill the minds of the servants, and, sometimes, I fear, of our visitants, with strange surmises, of which no one can foresee the consequences ; while your spectral dreams and night-walkings are more likely to be produced by the fumes of wine than by the misgivings of your conscience.

Command yourself; endeavour to correct this weakness, if not for my sake and your own, for that of our dear Mary, whose whole future life may now be said to depend upon your exercising a temporary command over your failings."

"And I should be a greater wretch and villain even than I am," said Lomax emphatically, "were I to entail misery upon my child by any indulgence or indiscretion which I have the power to control. Bear with me, and assist me, Jane, instead of irritating my wayward temper by contemptuous taunts and upbraidings, and I will do my best. At times I lose all command over my words or actions, but it is not always with drinking; and, if it were, you should excuse an oblivion to which I only fly as a refuge from wretchedness."

"I will excuse all your past indiscretions, if you will try to amend them in future."

"I will promise to make the attempt, and,

if you will only whisper in my ear, when I am drinking too freely, that our dear Mary's happiness is at stake, I think I shall have resolution enough to push the bottle from me."

To this determination Lomax adhered with an inflexibility that showed him still to possess an efficient command over himself, when he chose to exercise it; and the amended health, both of body and mind, that resulted from a strict temperance, not only enabled him to struggle better with his apprehensions during the day, but diminished the frequency of the hideous phantasms by which his repose at night had so often been disturbed. Unbroken sleep still further corroborating his faculties, enabled him to listen with complacency to the arguments of his wife, who now substituting conciliation and reasoning for menace and contempt, endeavoured most strenuously to convince him that all his fears and fancies were vain.

By this judicious treatment she succeeded in resuming her empire, and in soothing, for the moment, the terrors of a pusillanimous mind, and the stings of a guilty conscience. The prospect of Mary's advantageous establishment, and of the certain happiness that it would secure to her, operated as a welcome and lulling *Nepenthe* on the perturbed spirit of both her parents, who, during the courtship that now ensued, enjoyed a respite that appeared a perfect *Elysium*, when contrasted with their previous alarm, exacerbation, and anguish.

CHAPTER VII.

“ Oh, Love ! how are thy precious, sweetest moments
Thus ever crossed, thus vexed with disappointment ! ”

Rowe.

FOR a few days, Mrs. Hunter had persisted, although with very mysterious and significant looks, in refusing to satisfy the inquiries of her son as to the donor of the hundred pounds, by which his liberation from prison had been so quickly and so unexpectedly effected ; but, being from her natural simplicity and openness very ill calculated for concealments of any sort, she at length suffered her secret to ooze out. Had it been any other person, she might have hesitated, but Alfred, she argued,

was so particularly trustworthy, that she was sure even Miss Owen herself would not object to *his* knowing the whole affair, if it were divulged to him in strict confidence.

Thus fully justified, as she thought, in violating her promise, the good woman imparted to him the name of his benefactress, enlarging upon the handsome manner in which the boon had been conferred, as well as upon its important effects in screening him from the displeasure of Mr. Bryant, to whom his arrest remained unknown.

“And now, my dear Alfred,” continued the fond parent, “now that I am disburthening my bosom of its secrets, which I hate to keep there, because they are just like so many birds in a cage, fretting at their confinement, and longing to pop out and effect their escape, I must tell you of a discovery that I have made, and which I dare say you will be not a little surprised to hear.”

“I am all attention,” said the son, “for I see by your countenance that it is of pleasant import, and to such tidings I am but seldom called to listen.”

“No, indeed, my poor dear Alfred! you have nothing but annoyances and vexations to endure, and most sincerely do I wish—la! there’s a spot of ink upon the frill of your new shirt! I wish you wouldn’t hold your pen in your mouth. Dear! dear! where *did* I put my salt of lemons?”

“*My* vexations and annoyances, dear mother, are nothing, nothing whatever: I deserve them all. It is your privations and the sorrows of our dear pining Harriet that wring my heart, and, as I sometimes fear, have irritated and soured my temper.”

“Bless me, Alfred! don’t talk in that distressing way. I have no privations; I never was so happy in my life—nothing in the world to worry me, that is to say, just now,

for there is no rent coming due these two months ! Harriet will soon get over her low spirits, poor girl ! and as to your temper, every body says it is exactly like mine ; and whatever may be my other faults, I know myself to be so mild and gentle, that if any body else were to call you ill-natured, I could almost feel in my heart to scratch their eyes out."

"You have forgotten the secret that you were about to impart to me."

"Secret ! had I a secret ? well, I vow and declare I *had* almost forgotten all about it. Now, my dear Alfred, listen to me with all your ears." Here she drew her chair close to that of her son, took his hand, and, looking in his face, with an expression of arch and triumphant affection, continued—"Now that I have disclosed to you the name of your benefactress, tell me, can you or can you not give a shrewd guess at her motive for the gift ?"

“Assuredly I can. I presume her to have been actuated by a natural benevolence.”

“A natural fiddlestick! Pooh, pooh! don’t tell me. Generous she may be, but young ladies seldom bestow such large sums upon handsome and accomplished young men without—now don’t start and look angry, dear Alfred; you can’t deny that you *are* both handsome and accomplished—and young ladies, I repeat, seldom make such liberal donations without some feeling a *leetle* more warm and tender than mere bountifulness of disposition.”

“Ridiculous! this is the creation of your own overweening fancy, and I must entreat that you will never give utterance to a thought which is alike painful to me, and disparaging to Miss Owen.”

“Well, now, I call *that* ridiculous, if you please. I don’t know why it should be painful to you, and I am sure it cannot be dis-

paraging to Miss Owen: Your family is better than her's, though we are down in the world at present. You are a gentleman born and bred, and though——”

“Tush, madam! for Heaven's sake no more of this. You forget that Miss Owen is an heiress, and that I am degraded to a servile situation. Pray let us change the subject. Be assured that you have drawn a most erroneous conclusion from a single act of benevolence.”

“Don't tell me, Alfred; I know better. Ah! you should have seen her when I told her of your being arrested. She turned as pale as ashes, and panted for breath, and became so agitated, that I thought she would have gone into hysterics. Was *that* a simple feeling of charity? No, no; we women are not so easily to be deceived in one another's emotions. Having been in love myself, I know what it is—I remember, as well as if it were

only yesterday, when your poor dear father, who is now among the saints in heaven, was paying me his addresses, and fell from his horse, or rather the beast tumbled with him, for he was an excellent horseman, a friend called to tell me of the accident, and after desiring me to arm myself with all my fortitude, exclaimed, in a solemn voice——Look ! look ! Tabby has caught a mouse, I do declare ! —nay, you shall not torment the poor creature.’’

Up jumped the kind-hearted Mrs. Hunter, and, after declaring that, although these little pilferers were a sad plague to her, she could not bear to see them worried to death, she liberated the intended victim, which quickly made its escape, consoled Tabby for the loss by a lump of sugar, and was about to resume her story, when her son, who had often heard it before, assured her that her feelings upon the interesting occasion, to which she had

alluded, could not afford a faithful clue to those of Miss Owen, and implored her once more not to lend herself to a groundless delusion, which must wear an appearance of the vainest presumption, and the most inexcusable ingratitude, should it ever come to the knowledge of their benefactress.

“ Well, well,” said the mother, with a look of significant obstinacy, “ I am very willing to hold my tongue, but you cannot argue me out of my opinion. I will not refer to the subject, even in the remotest manner, since you desire me not ; but, say what you will, I am confident, and indeed I should wonder if it were otherwise, that a certain young lady who shall be nameless is in love with a certain young gentleman who shall be equally nameless.”

“ Gentleman ! ” exclaimed Alfred, smiling in bitter spirit. “ Are you alluding to Jacob Bryant’s Wharf-clerk ? ”

“ I am alluding to one who, let him fill what

situation he may, is every inch a gentleman, though I say it that shouldn't say it, and, therefore, you must not be seen with this ink-spot upon your frill. Ah ! I hope one of these days to see you restored to the rank of a gentleman, and conducting yourself as such, and then you will never, please God, have occasion to touch these nasty pens. Come along with me, and I will look for the salt of lemons. I *do* think I must have put it in the little drawer, under the beaufet, where I lock up the silver teapot and spoons — don't you, dear Alfred ? ”

“ *I* do not take up notions without some basis to support them,” replied the son, with a faint smile ; “ therefore, I must be excused from offering a guess on the subject.”

Notwithstanding the opinion he had thus confidently expressed, Hunter's demeanour towards Helen, influenced by a heartfelt gratitude for her recent generosity, uncon-

sciously assumed a more tender and deferential character than had hitherto been his wont. Never had he appeared to her to display his own talents to half so much advantage as when, deriving an evident gratification from eliciting her's, he sate by her side, gazing upon her with a look of respectful homage, asking her opinion upon various points of literature and art, deferring to her judgment, not with a servile acquiescence, but with the air of one who is really grateful for being enlightened, or yielding himself heartily, when she indulged her vivacious sallies, to the influence of her sportive wit.

From any undue conceit Helen was as free as most girls, but she had the foibles and feelings of our common nature; and it was hardly, therefore, to be expected that she should be insensible to this most refined and delicate of all flattery, coming from a man of acknowledged talents, who had already made

a much deeper impression upon her heart than she herself suspected.

By the sedulity of his homage to Helen, Hunter in the mean time had succeeded in persuading Rose, whatever she might have once suspected to the contrary, that his admiration and his regards were now diverted from herself and exclusively engrossed by her friend. The humility which is ever the concomitant of real merit and genius prevented her from being in the smallest degree surprised at this conviction, although it could not entirely obviate the secret pang by which it was accompanied. Not only did it seem to her perfectly natural that the vivacity, accomplishments, and amiability, of her friend should eclipse her own poor attractions, fading away as they evidently were under the withering influence of melancholy and ill health; but she clearly perceived and readily acknowledged that the attachment which, if directed towards herself, scarcely admitted the possibility



of any satisfactory result, became sanctioned, when Helen was its object, by every consideration of worldly prudence and discretion. Recollecting the birth, education, and personal recommendations of Hunter, she saw nothing whatever in his reduced circumstances that should deter him from aspiring to the hand of Helen ; indeed, there were innumerable motives, both in his own situation and in that of his family, which must manifestly prompt him to desire the alliance. In the firm persuasion that its accomplishment would secure the happiness of two parties, to one of whom she owed a long debt of gratitude, while her heart was not less tenderly interested in the welfare of the other, the generous girl determined to devote her influence and good offices to the promotion of their union.

With all the perseverance of high principle, all the ardour of a generous and determined self-sacrifice, she struggled against her feelings,



her appearance every day exhibiting with greater obviousness the ravages of the contest in which she was engaged. It seemed as if this delicate and fragile creature, who, even in her healthier state, rather resembled a spirit than an inhabitant of earth, was now, indeed, about to assume an ethereal form, and to pass away into some new element better adapted to the purity of her mind, and the transparent tenuity of her frame.

Mrs. Hunter, with all her simplicity, had a maternal eye to the main chance where her son was concerned; and, as she retained her conviction of Helen's prepossession, she failed not to sing the praises of his domestic virtues, and to extenuate the peccadilloes into which he had been betrayed. Her regard for veracity, however, would not allow her to conceal the pecuniary difficulties in which he was perpetually involving them, an indiscretion which the good lady condemned and vindicated in the

same breath. 'They might be freed, as it appeared, from their present embarrassments by a trifling sum, which Helen instantly resolved to advance, though she hesitated to disclose her purpose, and could not immediately decide upon the mode of effecting it.

From a closer observation of Mrs. Hunter, whose character, indeed, was almost as easy to be read as a printed book, she not only doubted her power to retain a secret, but began to apprehend that her own motives in the proposed donation were very likely to be misinterpreted. Had she said *detected*, she would, perhaps, have used a more appropriate term. Not choosing to subject herself to any such *injurious* suspicion; and afraid that she might be discovered by her hand-writing, should she transmit her gift in a cover addressed by herself, she finally concluded, after due cogitation, to avail herself of Rose's agency, as the most effectual mode for concealing the source of the gift. The venial

falsehood of writing within the envelope :—
“From an old friend of Mrs. Hunter’s family,”
would probably direct the suspicions of that
lady into some other quarter, and, if they
were turned towards herself, it was easy,
with the help of a little casuistry, to deny
that she had either written or forwarded the
letter.

Having formed this resolution, she hastened
to Rose’s apartment, and, with a flush upon
her features, which seemed to confirm the anger
she had assumed, exclaimed, as she threw her-
self into a chair :—“ Well ! I have no patience
whatever with this extravagant, thoughtless,
unfeeling Mr. Hunter. His conduct is really
abominable, and deserves to be exposed. Were
it the first, or even the second time, it might
be overlooked, but these reiterated indiscretions
are unpardonable, scandalous ! Surely he might
remember the claims of his family, even if he
chooses to forget what is due to himself.”

“Alas ! what new offence has he committed ?” demanded Rose eagerly, while her wan features reddened with apprehension.

“The worst species of new offence -- the repetition of an old one for which he has already suffered. By his extravagance and misconduct, he has once more exposed his affectionate mother and amiable sister to embarrassments of the most humiliating nature.”

“Ah, dear Helen ! is it not some extenuation of his fault that he was born to independence ? Nothing so difficult, especially for a young man, as to discard expensive habits, and suddenly practice a rigid thrift.”

“Ridiculous ! Sensible people will always adapt themselves to their circumstances ; and there are thousands who maintain themselves and their families in decent comfort, upon a much narrower income than that of Mr. Hunter.”

“Yes, but they have never known any better

state. To them economy is no effort, because it is no novelty; it has been the practice of their whole life; but to Mr. Hunter it is a new and painful task, and one which it must be exceedingly difficult to perform when every recollection of the past tempts him to forget the present."

"At all events, Rose, it is an imperative duty, and you will not surely excuse its non-performance, when it involves the peace and respectability of a whole family. Oh! I have no patience with him! especially as I have good reason to suspect that his mother and sister often deny themselves comforts, that they may provide him little luxuries and indulgences. However, I came not hither to talk of Mr. Hunter, indeed I care not how rarely his name is mentioned, but to have a little chat with you about the old lady, whose painful condition I most sincerely commiserate, especially when I call to mind how trying and irk-

some it must be for one who has moved in a better sphere to be reduced in life, and obliged to contend with all the hardships of comparative poverty.’’

“You said, just now, that sensible people would always adapt themselves to their circumstances.”

“I was speaking then of young men, to whom the rough trials of life are a mere pastime, and who ought to conform themselves to their station, however humble, without difficulty. With an elderly female the case is very different. Mrs. Hunter, nevertheless, *is* reconciled to her lowly lot, and never seems to regret it, except on the account of her undeserving son. She is a most estimable person; a kinder and more single-hearted woman I never knew; and poor Harriet, whose depression of spirits I can now well explain, is really a most intelligent and amiable girl. I cannot bear to see such deserving persons exposed to the annoyance of

duns for a mere trifle ; and I was thinking, therefore, my sweet little Rose de Meaux, of sending them, anonymously, of course, a sufficient sum to extricate them from their immediate difficulties."

"It was a thought worthy of yourself," said Rose, pressing her friend's hand to her heart, while she glowed with the pleasure that always thrilled her whole sensitive frame at the mention of any generous deed.

"Nay," resumed Helen, "you mean it would be utterly unworthy of me to act otherwise, the amount being so insignificant. I need not add that the transaction must remain a secret between you and me. From considerations of delicacy, I shall send the money anonymously, and, as my hand-writing is known to Mrs. Hunter, I wish you to direct the *envelope*, lest the good lady should attribute my interference to improper motives."

“To improper motives! By what motives can she ——?”

“Psha! I meant to say erroneous. One would not wish — people are so apt ——, mis-constructions are very annoying — surely you can understand my feelings.”

“I believe I do,” said Rose with a faint smile; “and I will willingly lend my assistance to your benevolent views. It will be a great relief to poor Mr. Hunter’s mind to find that his family ——.”

“Oh! don’t mention *his* feelings! he deserves to be punished, were it ten times as much. Say no more about him, but come with me to my room, and I will instruct you what to write on the inside of the cover.”

Here the conversation ended for the present; but enough had been said to convince Rose that, although Helen’s natural benevolence might have prompted her to assist the mother and daughter, her sympathies were much

more deeply engaged for the son, in spite of the increased acerbity with which she condemned what she now termed his profligate courses.

CHAPTER VIII.

“The hearts of old gave hands ;
But now our heraldry is—hands, not hearts.”

OTHELLO.

HOWEVER adroitly Rose might acquit herself of the little commission thus entrusted to her, she could not effectually succeed in hoodwinking Mrs. Hunter, whose penetration, not usually very keen, was quickened by her suspicion of Helen's latent attachment to her son.

In less than ten minutes after having received the last-mentioned letter, she bustled into the sitting-room at Eagle Wharf, her benevolent countenance radiant with surprise and complacency, as she exclaimed : “ Well, my

dear Miss Owen ! Here 's a mysterious affair ! Of all the days in the week only to think—La ! I have hurried up stairs so fast, that I have no breath left ; only to think, I say, of my receiving such a letter as this on a Friday ! Lookee here — a sheet of common post paper wrapped up in half a sheet of gilt edged ! *that* I call extravagant—and enclosing a bank-note for fifty pounds ! There now ; what *do* you think of that ? Wonders, they may well say, will never cease. And such a beautiful, nice, new, clean bank-note, too. I 'm sure, if they were all like this in the time of Timothy or Titus, they would never have talked about filthy lucre."

" Singular enough," said Helen, endeavouring to look as unconcerned as possible, though she had betrayed an evident confusion, on the first production of the letter. " In a blank cover was it sent ? "

" Why, all as good ; for there were only

these words in a strange handwriting, ‘ From an old friend of Mrs. Hunter’s family.’ ”

“ Some one, doubtless, with whom you have been intimately acquainted in former days. Cannot you guess whence it comes ? ”

“ La, dear, yes ! I can *guess* fast enough,” replied Mrs. Hunter, smiling significantly at her companion, who, in spite of her assumed nonchalance, again blushed as she hastily exclaimed—

“ Moving in the sphere you formerly occupied, I dare say you must have known many friends both able and willing to confer upon you so trifling an act of courtesy.”

“ Why, that is likely enough, for I knew at least a dozen to whom I would gladly have shown such a kindness, supposing our circumstances to have been reversed ; but, you see, none of our former acquaintance know where to find us out, for Alfred cannot bear that any of them should see us in our present reduced

plight ; and besides they all live a long way off in the country."

"But they might send you a letter, nevertheless," observed Helen.

"Not if they were ignorant of our address ; and even if they were not, I cannot *quite* understand, my dear Miss Owen, how it should come to have the Tooley Street postmark upon it, which you know is in our own immediate neighbourhood."

At these words she pointed to the back of the letter, smirking and nodding with such a manifest consciousness, which she did not choose more openly to avow, that Helen who, as well as Rose, had completely overlooked the suspicions to which the postmark might give rise, jumped up, in order to conceal her embarrassment, exclaiming, as she turned away her face ; " Well, well ; it matters little from whom it came ; such a trifle is scarcely worth talking about."

“ It is no trifle to me, my dear young lady, whatever it might be to you. It comes, I assure you, in the very nick of time, and whoever may be my benefactor or benefactress, I don’t know which it is, I sincerely hope that Heaven will shower down — La! there is a shower falling, I do declare, for the people in yonder boat have got their umbrellas up, and I left mine at home! How could I be so careless, and my best bonnet too! It did spit a little just as I got to the Wharf, but I was in hopes it had all blown over. However, I shall stay here till it’s fine, the rain may depend upon that! ”

The threatened danger of her bonnet not only drove out of the good lady’s head the completion of her prayer, but even the purport of her visit, to which she alluded no more, but sat watching and upbraiding the shower, with sundry exclamations of, “ Well, if ever! ” until she availed herself of a gleam

of sunshine, to bid her friend a hasty adieu, and to hurry home.

Fortified with the accumulated proofs she had collected, Mrs. Hunter impatiently awaited the return of her son, when she produced the letter, detailed all the evidence of its coming from Helen, alluded triumphantly to her assertions about the first donation, and concluded by demanding whether he still entertained a doubt upon the subject.

“I must acknowledge,” was the reply, “that I believe your surmises to be well founded; but if Miss Owen wishes her benefactions to remain secret, there would be a great indelicacy in our compelling her to avow them; and we had better, therefore, not take any notice of the transaction, however ardently we may wish to give expression to our gratitude. How fortunate, in the midst of all our misfortunes, that Miss Owen should have taken such a liking to you and Harriet.”

“Heaven forbid, dear Alfred, that I should not feel duly grateful for all her kindness ; but I shrewdly suspect that she has taken a still stronger liking to a certain son of mine, whose name I won’t mention because I said I would not. O Alfred, Alfred ! how much might you do for yourself, for our dear Harriet, and for me, if you could but be persuaded to see things as I see them, and as they really are ! Again and again do I tell you that a certain young lady is in love with you ; mind—I mention no names ; and if you do not strike when the iron’s hot, and carry off the prize before any other candidates appear, you will not be doing your duty to —— stop a minute ! there’s the knife-grinder going by, and I *must* tell him to call, for I cannot bear to be always hacking and hewing with that horrid old carving-knife. Mrs. Tibbs ought to pay for the grinding ; but we won’t quarrel about two-pence *now*.”

“Psha ! don’t tell me,” resumed the mother, as she again bustled into the room—“it’s no use your denying the fact, and still less your desiring me never to allude to the subject, though I am very willing to avoid all mention of names. ‘Faint heart never won fair lady.’ Only get courage enough, dear Alfred, to make the attempt, and I will answer for your success ; and even if you fail, we are only where we were.”

“Pardon me, madam ; we shall have forfeited the friendship of Miss Owen, and I shall have lost my situation at the Wharf, for Mrs. Bryant will hardly retain me after such an instance of presumption.”

“Presumption ! I like that ! You are of better blood, and much more of a gentleman than he or any of his family, and, if he chooses to take offence, let him take it. We can scarcely be worse off than we are already, for there is hardly a day passes that I am not

worried to death with duns of one sort or another.”

An involuntary sigh escaped from the son, and his eyes were bent to the ground in the painful consciousness that he was the sole author of all their troubles ; when Mrs. Hunter, who had no intention of rebuking him, for an intentional reproach had never escaped her lips, seized his hand, and rapidly continued:—
“ Now do n’t mistake me, dear Alfred : do n’t suppose that I care a button about these duns, not I. Indeed, I rather prefer their calling now and then, for we have so few visitants, and lead so lonesome a life, that Harriet and I want a little occasional enlivening, or we should sink quite into the dumps. Only reflect upon what I have said ; and I am sure, your own good sense, and good heart, will lead you to do whatever is right and proper.”

Persuasions to reflection were quite unnecessary. Hunter thought long and deeply upon

the subject, and the result was a decided conviction that Helen, notwithstanding the recent capriciousness of her demeanour, was so far well disposed towards him, that he might venture to make her an offer of his hand, not only without subjecting himself to a charge of arrogance, but with a reasonable prospect of succeeding in his suit.

Upon a mind like Helen's, he believed that the disparity of their circumstances would have very little influence; nor did he apprehend that the hostility of Mr. and Mrs. Bryant, for which he was fully prepared, would induce her to swerve from her purpose, should she decide in his favour, for he knew her to be of a firm and determined character. Grateful as he was for her recent generosity, he could not bear to subject himself to a repetition of it.

His pride made him impatient of obligation, however delicately conferred, and he saw no other chance of discharging the debt he had incurred,

than by offering to devote his whole life to the happiness of the donor.

It was only when he acknowledged the feasibility of his mother's suggestions, and the inappreciable advantages which his family would derive from the successful prosecution of his addresses to Helen, that Hunter felt the full difficulty of his situation. Vain was the hope with which he had flattered himself that he had conquered, or at least weakened, the force of his ill-fated passion for Rose Mayhew. That struggle was now to be fought afresh, and with an increased painfulness, for he loved her with a tenderer and more ineradicable affection, now that he was about to incur the risk of losing her for ever.

That his attachment was still reciprocated by Rose, notwithstanding the late avoidance of each other's society, which both seemed to have adopted from the same sense of duty and propriety, he had but too much reason for be-

lieving. Her fading beauty and impaired health he attributed to the conflict of her feelings, while the touching meekness with which she appeared to have resigned herself to her fate sent a pang to his heart that thrilled through his whole frame.

Doubly now did he congratulate himself on the unflinching resolution with which he had curbed his feelings and his tongue, and had suppressed every betrayal of his unhappy predilection: but while his affections were thus deeply, although secretly engaged, could he, ought he, as a man of honour, to lead up another female to the altar, and by a solemn and irrevocable vow dedicate to her a heart which he had not the power of bestowing?

This was the perplexing doubt that tormented him by day, and haunted him during many a sleepless night, while the harassing suspense in which he was kept only incapacitated him the more from arriving at any satisfactory conclusion.

Circumstances soon compelled the decision which his own energies seemed unable to form. Holloway, the young man to whom his sister Harriet had been betrothed, and whose parents would not consent to the marriage because her portion had been dissipated by her brother, arrived in London at this period, and instantly perceived the probable success that would attend his own suit, if that of Hunter were pushed to a prosperous issue. A new and delightful hope springing up in his bosom, he sought an interview with Alfred, and, frankly stating the information which he had received as to Helen's property, and the presumed state of her affections, asked him why he refused to avail himself of the glorious opportunity for redeeming the fortunes of his family, which fate was ready to throw into his hands, if he would only grasp it.

“Poor, and utterly dependent as I am at present,” said Holloway, “it would be a proof

of selfishness and temerity, not of a generous and considerate attachment, were I to ask our dear Harriet, who was born to so much higher hopes, to enter with me into a painful struggle for the means of subsistence. You are aware that, by the consent of all parties, your sister's portion had been destined to purchase me a partnership with my present employers, an arrangement which was prevented by the unfortunate reverse in your affairs."

"Reverse !" cried Hunter, striking his forehead. "By my unjustifiable folly, you mean ; by my wild enterprizes, and frantic speculations. I am the Jonah who have brought this storm upon my family. Oh ! would that it could be allayed by the sacrifice of the offender."

"You *can* allay it, you can restore prosperity to us all, not only without a sacrifice, but with the certainty of securing your own happiness, as well as that of all your connexions. Mentioning no names, and scrupulously avoiding

any thing that might compromise other parties, I have demanded of my father and of my employers, whether, in the event of your marrying a woman of fortune, the former would withdraw his objections to my union with Harriet, and the latter would receive me as a partner. In their answers they accede, as you will see, to my wishes ; and I appeal to yourself whether I have not some right to expect that you should at least make an attempt to realize all these visions of happiness.”

“ Oh ! you have, doubtless, a right, an abundant right,” cried Hunter, walking up and down the room in a hurried and agitated manner ; “ and, when there is a chance of effecting so much for my dear mother, for Harriet, and for yourself, I am a wretch to suffer any considerations of my own probable misery ——.”

“ Misery !” interposed Holloway ; “ how can you be rendered miserable by conferring hap-

piness upon all your friends? Is there any thing saddening in the prospect of enjoying the pleasures of comparative affluence, in the society of a wife who, if I have been rightly informed, is amiable, accomplished, and attractive?"

"She is; she is every thing that you have been told, and yet I had a thousand times rather ——, but no, no, no! Wretched and heart-broken I may be, but I will not be a villain; I will sacrifice myself for the sake of ——. Tell me, did Harriet urge you to make this application?"

"No, indeed; she has refrained, as she tells me, from ever mentioning the subject to you, although frequently solicited to do so by her mother, lest you should be prompted by your brotherly affection to put a violence upon your own inclinations."

"Generous, kind-hearted girl! I half suspected as much. Had she reproached me, as

she was so well entitled to do, methinks I could have borne it ; but her meek heroism, her uncomplaining sorrow, her undiminished affection and delicate consideration — these, these are irresistible. I cannot, will not, any longer bear the sight of her waning health, and of her vain efforts to conceal from me the sad prostration of her spirits. Holloway ! you have conquered — I submit. I will be the martyr ; you and our Harriet shall be happy ; but you must grant me a day or two to consider how I may accomplish your wishes with the greatest probability of success, for, in my present perturbation of mind, I can neither act nor think as I ought to do. Farewell ! I will see you to-morrow.”

So saying, he hurried out of the room without awaiting the reply of his companion, who was anxious to learn how his union with a clever and agreeable heiress could possibly be considered a martyrdom, or be viewed with such an inexplicable repugnance.

On the morrow a new and painful occurrence confirmed the wavering resolution of Hunter. One of his mother's creditor's, after having long foregone his claim for an old debt, put an execution in the house, and seized the few articles of value which she had saved out of the wreck of her fortunes. These relics were less appreciated for their intrinsic worth, than for the associations connected with them. One had been the gift of her husband before their marriage, another had belonged to her father, a third was a present from a deceased friend : all had been preserved, under the most pressing difficulties, with a fond tenacity, and all were endeared to her by their awakening a thousand reminiscences of pleasant days now passed away, but not, as she trusted, for ever, for she clung to the superstitious hope that they might eventually return, so long as she was surrounded by these cherished memorials.

There was a charm about them, that seemed

to link the cloudless prosperity she had enjoyed in the morning and meridian of life with a coming evening equally delightful and serene ; and the good lady, who had borne all her previous trials with a comparative philosophy, was completely overcome by the threatened privation of these ancient though inanimate friends.

“ Farewell, farewell for ever to our good luck ! ” she exclaimed in a passion of grief, “ if the old clock, and the japan cabinet, and the beautiful inlaid wardrobe, and the silver tea-pot, and all my treasured darlings, are to be torn away from us. Never, never shall we hold up our heads again, or recover our place in society, if we are to be separated from these dear companions of our better days, the only ones who have stuck to us in our adversity. And my boy’s drawings, too : surely, surely they will not take *those* away. Alfred, dearest Alfred ! will you allow them thus to tear out

my heart-strings, when you know that you have the power of preventing it?"

The unfortunate son, surveying the scene before him with the stupor of a calm despair, without daring to look her in her face, turned his regards upon his sister, who said nothing, but whose eyes, suffused with tears, seemed, for the first time, to convey an expression of reproach.

Meek and subdued as was this silent appeal, it went to the very heart of her brother, who in vain attempted to conceal his emotions as he held out a hand to each, and exclaimed in a broken voice :—"Mother! Harriet! be comforted; you shall have no further cause to complain of me. I have already promised our good friend Holloway that I would comply with all your wishes, and Heaven grant that we may none of us be disappointed in the result! As to this execution upon our goods and chattels, it shall, at all events, be removed for the pre-

sent. Our creditor, who is a humane man, will not refuse to grant us a few days' respite, when he is apprized that a short delay may enable us to satisfy his claim. I will see him instantly, and get this unwelcome visitant, who is so unconcernedly taking an inventory of our effects, shortly expelled from our apartments."

For this purpose he hastened from the room, which he had no sooner quitted than his sister, who had partially restrained her feelings in his presence, gave a free vent to her tears, and sobbed aloud; while the mother, crying and laughing at the same moment, and totally regardless of the sheriff's-officer, who stared at her with amazement, affectionately kissed her favourite articles of furniture, congratulating them, as if they had been rational beings, on the probability that the menaced separation would now be prevented, and that they might continue together as happily as heretofore.

CHAPTER IX.

“I know a discontented gentleman,
Whose humble means match not his haughty mind :
Gold were as good as twenty orators,
And will, no doubt, tempt him to any thing.”

RICHARD III.

“I AM fairly chased and driven into the toils,” said Hunter to himself, as he hastened back to his own room, after having obtained the consent of their creditor to withdraw the execution : “Friends, family, circumstances, all things conspiring against me ; I must e’ en leap into the gulf, like a second Curtius, and sacrifice myself for the good of others. And why should I not ? ay, and readily and joyfully too ? A marriage with Miss Owen is no such terrible calamity, that I should shrink from it

with so fastidious a hesitation ; and as to the scruples that have hitherto deterred me, to what do they amount ? I give my hand to one woman, while my heart is in possession of—— Heigho ! no more, no more—for ‘that way madness lies !’ Well, I put a violence upon my feelings ; I stifle my unhappy passion for one whom it would be a folly, as well as a selfish cruelty, to marry ; I espouse Miss Owen — I solemnly swear to love, honour, and cherish her, and I will sacredly perform my vow. Religion, gratitude, duty, will impel me to redeem my pledge ; and if I know any thing of myself, they will never appeal to me in vain. Heedless, foolish, extravagant, I may have been ; but unprincipled I am not, nor ever was. And how many men daily present themselves at the marriage altar, subsequently to become happy and devoted husbands, whose affections, at the moment, were in the same predicament as my own. Love is, perhaps, more likely to be the

permanent result, where it does not constitute the sole primary motive to a marriage. Men contract matrimony for various objects — for money; rank, birth, connections, temper, beauty ; and all seem to afford an equal chance of happiness—or misery !

“ Psha ! there is nothing, after all, like a discreet, advantageous, worldly match, such, for instance, as the union of a penniless wharf clerk with a young and not unattractive heiress ! Like my good, kind, simple-hearted mother, I will mention no names, but the hint shall not be thrown away upon me. And what signify Cupid’s flames and darts —affection, passion, and all that fleeting effervescence of the heart which forms the romance of the young and sanguine amourist ? Where there is compatibility of temper, age, disposition, and circumstances, love must inevitably follow, even although it may not have preceded, marriage ; where these are wanting, it cannot long sur-

vive, however vigorously it may have existed before wedlock. A short indifference, leading to a durable and rational attachment, is much better than the brief honeymoon of passion, which is so often extinguished in a long and cheerless night of alienation.

“Yes, yes—mine will be the more prudent choice, and who shall henceforward charge me with recklessness or improvidence? Were it otherwise, indeed, I must submit to my fate. I have no right to enter into calculations upon the subject, as if I were a free agent. Not for myself, Heaven knows! but for others, am I about to become a happy—Ha! ha—happy! well, let that pass. Enough for me, even should I entail wretchedness upon myself, that I shall confer happiness upon my dear mother, upon Harriet, upon Holloway. Not even for them, however, can I screw up my courage to a personal interview with Miss Owen, nor do I well know how I shall shape my saucy

proposal, even with the aid of pen and paper."

With an impetuosity that seemed to distrust its own purpose if it were allowed to cool, he seized the writing materials, and instead of the "Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise, and three-piled hyperboles," which usually characterize a love letter, hastily dashed off the following.

"Did I not believe the condescension and kindness of Miss Owen to be at least equal to her talents and accomplishments, I could never summon courage to urge the proposal which I am now about to submit to her consideration—perhaps, I should rather say, to her forgiveness. Even with this conviction upon my mind, I hesitate to make the daring avowal which—but it is useless to delay, it is impossible any longer to suppress it. Have pity upon me, I beseech you, and believe me when I affirm, that however my present boldness may savour of pre-

sumption and arrogance, my feelings towards you, be your decision favourable or adverse, must unalterably be those of the profoundest respect and gratitude.

“ You found me here in the menial, the degrading, situation of wharf clerk to your uncle, an occupation to which I honestly confess my utter repugnance ; although I have endeavoured to discharge its duties as well as a revolted and unhappy mind would allow me. Notwithstanding this disparity in our circumstances, you favoured me with your notice, you suffered me to share your society, perhaps it is not too much to add that you honoured me with your friendship. Once more forgive me if this be a vain and overweening conclusion, for my feelings are excited, almost to bewilderment, and I scarcely know what I write. You gave me reason, at all events, to believe that my society was not altogether displeasing to you, and poor as it is, this is the only excuse I can

assign, for raising my aspiring thoughts to a still higher distinction, and daring to solicit the honour of your hand in marriage.

“The word is written. I have passed the Rubicon—my fate is at your disposal. Reject me if you will, but do not upbraid me, do not hate me, do not increase the sufferings of a heart already wrung with sorrow and remorse; and suffer me to add in extenuation of my audacity, that by birth, by education, and, I trust, by the honourable feelings which confer its best dignity upon the character, I presume to call myself a gentleman. Should you, in allowing my claim to that distinction, consider yourself warranted in granting my suit, you will have a much better security than any that I could offer by oaths and protestations for my conscientious, grateful, and lifelong devotion to your happiness.

“You have a right, however, to be satisfied upon one point. Fear not, in the event of your

rejecting me, (alas ! it is but too probable a contingency,) that I shall embarrass you by my continued presence at the Wharf. No ! my mind is made up. In that case, I shall immediately embark with my mother and sister for Canada, where we have a relation who has promised to assist my efforts for the restoration of our fallen fortunes. That country, inclement as it is, may, perhaps, be kinder to me than the land of my birth, and I may there find the peace and prosperity which in England will ever, as I fear, be denied to the reduced, the disappointed, and the unhappy

“ALFRED HUNTER.”

Helen, who was sitting at work with Rose when she received this epistle, was variously and vehemently affected during its perusal. Although she had believed for some time past that the affections of the writer were not altogether uninterested in his pointed and unremitting attentions, she had neither anticipated

so immediate a declaration, nor that it would be made in writing. The agitation of her surprised feelings, the tender delight that thrilled through her heaving bosom, and deeply suffused her features, revealed to her, for the first time, the depth and the intensity of her attachment. She drew two or three gasping inspirations, and then, laying her trembling hand upon the shoulder of her companion, exclaimed in a broken voice, "Open the window, my dear Rose. I am a little overcome, but I shall be better presently. Such a strange—such an unexpected—but with you I can have no secrets, my more than sister, my best of friends! My happiness is your's, and your's is mine. And yet I should like to keep you awhile in suspense, for you would never, never guess the contents of this letter."

"Pardon me," replied Rose, endeavouring to look arch and smiling, although the blood had fled from her cheeks, and even from her

lips— "The letter is from Mr. Hunter, and it contains an offer of his hand."

"Amazing ! did he then acquaint you with his intentions ? "

"No, indeed ; he has scarcely spoken to me for many weeks past ; but I have long discovered his secret, I recognized his handwriting in the superscription, and your eloquent countenance told me all the rest. I read your features, which was quite equal to a perusal of your letter."

"Positively, my dear little Rose *de Meaux*, you almost make me afraid of you. It is dangerous to be in your society, for your eyes are like the spear of Ithuriel, and your acute penetration rather resembles that of a spirit, than of a creature of the earth. At this very moment I believe you are acquainted with my inmost thoughts."

"I suspect that I am, nor would your silence prevent me, for your face is a dial which,

although it be voiceless, reveals what is passing within it."

"That you are a sorceress I will not affirm, but I know you to be an enchantress ; and as I suspect that you could divine, if you wished it, every word of this letter, my putting it into your hands is no great proof of confidence towards you, nor any violation of it towards the writer."

With these words, which she had uttered in a tone of *nonchalance* little in accordance with her real feelings, she delivered the letter to her companion, and leaning over her shoulder began to read it over again, her first agitated perusal having left upon her mind only a general impression of its contents. This process she had scarcely commenced, when it was interrupted by her somewhat petulant exclamation of—"For Heaven's sake, Rose, do hold the paper a little more steadily ; your hand shakes so, that it is impossible to read a line ; and

indeed you tremble all over, like an aspen leaf."

Her friend, whose lightning glance, whenever she was reading, always outstripped the quickest eyes of others, paid no attention to this remark, but rapidly turned over the paper, and had just reached the signature, when an unbidden and unconscious tear fell upon the extended arm of her companion.

"My sweet little Mimosa!" exclaimed the latter, tenderly embracing her, "I am gratified more than I can express, by this touching proof of your sympathy, but you must not indulge such an intensity of feeling. You are a thousand times more agitated than I am myself; one would really imagine that the letter was addressed to you, not to me."

Rose attempted to gasp a reply, but her words were choked by sobs; and her feelings now becoming utterly irrepressible, she buried her head in the bosom of her friend, and burst

into a passionate flood of tears. It was but a short paroxysm, for she presently raised up her sylph-like form, and making an effort to conquer her emotion, though the dark fringes of her downcast eyes were still bedewed with tears, she said in a low, tremulous voice—

“Forgive me, dear Helen; I have always been foolishly sensitive, as you well know; and since this tedious illness I am subject to a morbid nervousness which, at times, completely overcomes me. You were kind enough to say just now, that my happiness was your’s, and most truly can I affirm that your’s is mine. It was this thought, and the prospect of the certain felicity opening upon you from your union with—in short, my feelings got the better of me; but I am calm now, quite collected, and can thank you for your confidence in showing me this letter, which has made me very, very—happy.”

The last lingering word was scarcely audible,

and the poor girl was fain to affect a cough, in order to conceal her returning emotion.

“My sweet little trembler!” cried her friend, pressing her affectionately to her bosom —“you must really, I repeat, check this acute sensibility—or it will shake to pieces your fragile and attenuated frame.”

“If I thought so, I would rather encourage than repress it,” sighed Rose.

“Nay, nay, you shall not give way to melancholy on so pleasant an occasion as my receiving an offer of marriage. I will not ask you what you think of his letter, for you can scarcely have read it in the moment that your eyes flitted over the lines.”

“I could repeat every word of it.”

“You are a wonderful and gifted creature, but, as I possess no such intuitive and supernatural insight, and still less so retentive a memory, you must allow me a second perusal of this impertinent epistle.”

So saying, she took it from the hand of her friend, and after having read it deliberately over, suddenly exclaimed, "This a love-letter ! why, there is no such word as 'love' in the whole composition. It seems to have been drawn up by a lawyer — formal as an apprentice's indenture, and cold as a magistrate's mittimus. Cupid's flames have no effect upon my uninflamable suitor: he remains as cool as a cucumber. Here are respect, and gratitude, and friendship, and conscientious discharge of his duty, and so forth, but not the smallest mention of admiration and attachment, not a single passing compliment—Heaven save the mark !—to my irresistible attractions, not a solitary phrase that savours of a lover's ardour and devotion. ' Was ever woman in such fashion woo'd ? was ever woman in such fashion won ? ' "

" He tells you that his feelings are excited

almost to bewilderment—that he scarcely knows what he writes.”

“Love, at all events, does not seem to be responsible for his emotion, for there is not an atom of passion in this hasty scrawl. It contains a proposal of marriage, indeed, but for aught that appears to the contrary, the writer might be in love with another woman.”

“Do you think so?” sighed Rose, while her heart palpitated vehemently, and the returning blood suddenly reddened her face and forehead. “Surely, surely, the offer of his hand sufficiently shows the real state of his affections.”

“It might, dear Rose, if men never gave the hand without the heart; but is it not just possible that this unimpassioned suitor, like Marmontel’s *Philosophe Soi-disant*, may be simply smitten by the sparkling eyes of my money-box?”

“Mr. Hunter is incapable of any thing

sordid and ungenerous ; that he should be base or unprincipled is impossible, quite impossible. I believe him to possess every good quality that can render him worthy to be the husband, even of my noble-minded Helen, and I know not how I could pronounce a higher eulogy."

"Heyday ! what a zealous and animated advocate have you suddenly become ! Would you then seriously and deliberately recommend me to marry the creature ? "

"I would, I would ; and if you act upon my most strenuous advice, I can almost stake my existence that you will never, never, have reason to repent your choice."

"Have you forgotten all the faults and bad qualities that we have observed in him ourselves, or have heard imputed to him by others ? Let me recapitulate them. Imprudence — extravagance — speculation — gambling — irritability — capriciousness — pride — inattention to business ; to which goodly list we must add,

on the authority of Mrs. Skinner, irreligion, a proneness to low company and to deep potations.’’

“ As he has triumphantly refuted the first of that woman’s vile calumnies, I totally disbelieve the others ; and as to the little indiscretions that we ourselves have remarked, to what do they amount? Who is perfect—what man is faultless, which of us is impeccable? O Helen, Helen, do not trifle on a subject so solemn and important as this. Do not, from fastidiousness or caprice, throw away the chance, the certainty, of a happiness which the first woman in the land might justly envy you. To Mr. Hunter’s failings I am by no means blind. He wants the strength of mind that should reconcile him to the fallen fortunes, not of himself, but of his mother and his sister, of whose reverses he feels himself to have been the unintentional author. But by how many noble and exalted qualities are his infirmities

redeemed! Religious, in the highest sense of the word; gentle, generous, and affectionate, he possesses, in an eminent degree, every accomplishment calculated to bless and adorn domestic life."

"Bravo!" cried Helen. "Take breath, and let me know when you have come to the end of your panegyric."

"And the pride to which you have objected," continued Rose, "what is it but the natural result of poverty and disappointment, acting upon a high spirit conscious of its own dignity; what is it but the excusable jealousy of a gentleman, only the more anxious to uphold his personal, because he has lost his pecuniary, independence. The sense of his birthright is perpetually struggling with his sense of the wrongs of fortune; and he wants, as I have already admitted, the fortitude and resignation that should enable him to maintain this painful conflict. But Helen, dearest Helen! you will

not suffer him to become whirled round and round in the vortex, until he sinks from giddiness and exhaustion. You will bravely snatch him from the storm, you will save him from himself ; he tells you, he forewarns you, that his fate is in your hands ; and never, no never, will you incur the awful responsibility of suffering so noble a nature to sink into hopeless degradation ; you will never drive him to despair. By restoring him to his rank in society, you will correct all his failings, develop all his virtues, and, reaping the benefits that you confer, you will thus permanently accomplish both his happiness and your own."

"No Pythoness, dear Rose, ever looked half so earnest or so beautiful as you do at the present moment, and few, perhaps, have ever poured forth their inspiration with a more spontaneous fluency ; but you forget, in making this forcible appeal to my feelings, that charity begins at home. Am I, prithee, to throw my-

self away, in order to prevent Mr. Hunter from doing the same? Lud, child! would you hurry me into a marriage of compassion with a poor, proud, decayed gentleman, without once inquiring the state of my affections?"

"*That* I had already ascertained. Ah, Helen! you cannot deceive me; I have long since penetrated into your heart and discovered its secret. In spite of Mr. Hunter's little imperfections, you think of him favourably, highly, fondly, and that conscious blush betrays that I have read you right."

"Ridiculous! you are quick-sighted, I confess; but you must not mistake fancy for intuition, and indulge in such groundless reveries about my affections. If I have any regard for him, of which I am not quite sure, I may safely say with Beatrice that I love him 'no more than reason;' and as to my leaving him to perish, you forget how my haughty gentleman has provided beforehand against my

rejection of his suit, by telling me that he has secured an asylum in Canada.”

“An Elysium in the wilderness—a Paradise in the desert. Have you the heart, Helen, to condemn a highly cultivated and intellectual mind like his, formed to be the ornament of polished society, to a life of solitude and degrading drudgery, amid the snows and forests of North America? Would you expose his aged mother, and our poor, delicate, sinking Harriet, to the miseries of exile and the rigours of an inhospitable climate?”

Protesting her anxiety to save them from this fate, Helen contended that their expatriation was by no means an inevitable alternative, as Hunter, if he possessed the various talents for which his eulogist gave him credit, ought to be well able to maintain his family in his own country. With the true selfishness and cunning of love, she then proceeded to urge other, and even imaginary, objections against

him, for the mere pleasure of hearing them refuted by Rose, who pleaded his cause with a continued enthusiasm of which the effects were manifest in her glowing cheeks, her sparkling eyes, and the animation of her countenance. The result of this controversy, which was prolonged till the evening, was a tardy confession, on the part of Helen, that she should be disposed to think favourably of Hunter's suit, provided he could clear up certain imputations upon his character, which had not hitherto been satisfactorily disproved to her own mind, however they might be discredited by Rose. For this purpose she resolved to grant him an interview, and to demand full explanations upon every point that still remained subject to the smallest doubt.

Scarcely had the friends arrived at this conclusion, when the door was suddenly opened, and Mrs. Skinner hurried into the room, her eyes gleaming with a malignant exultation, as

she exclaimed, " Well, Miss Owen, well, Miss Mayhew ; I am so glad I found you at home. You would not believe me when I told you of Mr. Hunter's profligate goings-on. You said they were gross and scandalous inventions. Not that the stories originated with *me*, for if there is one thing upon earth that I abominate more than another, it is tattling and detraction. 'Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer,' saith the holy Scripture, and Heaven knows I am the last person to disobey the divine precept. I never listen to the gossip of my backbiting neighbours, whom I acknowledge to be a very bad set ; but one cannot shut one's eyes, and seeing, you know, Miss Owen, is believing, Miss Owen. I told you what I had heard from others — that Mr. Hunter was a confirmed tippler. Well, I met him just now in Tooley Street ; and, perceiving by his look, his manner, and his walk, that he had been indulging too freely in the bottle, I turned

round and followed him to the counting-house, when he got into an instant quarrel with his benefactor, good Mr. Bryant, loaded him with abuse, and is at this moment tossing the books about the place in a state of filthy intoxication."

"Impossible!" was the simultaneous exclamation of both her auditors.

"Ay, I thought you would say so, that is always the way. Hark! methinks I hear him brawling on the Wharf, and you will, perhaps, trust the evidence of your own eyes. Ha! there he is. What say you now?"

At these words, Helen and Rose looked out of the open window. The setting sun, as if to make atonement for the rarity of its visits, shone with an unusual brilliancy over the Wharf, towards the centre of which they beheld Hunter, seated upon a tall hogshead, and brandishing a long counting-house ruler, with all the ridiculous gesticulations of ebriety.

His hat was off, his profuse locks were disordered, and the bright rays of the sun imparted an additional redness to his flushed features. An air of happy triumph animated his countenance, and his voice, though elevated, was neither harsh nor menacing as he exclaimed—

“Once more, Jacob Bryant, I warn thee at thy peril not to approach me, for no longer will I be thy bondsman, thy galley-slave. Logs will I no longer carry for thee, but I will espouse the fair Miranda, and become the monarch of an enchanted island. Behold I am a king already ; I am seated on my throne ; this is my royal sceptre ; and as for my golden crown, I will wreath my brows with a sun-beam, until my locks become glorious as those of Apollo. Avaunt, Jacob ! I defy thee. Most worthy art thou to be primate of the Fish-mongers’ Company, for thine eyes and thy very looks are fishy. Approach not, therefore,

my magic wand, lest I metamorphose thee into a Nereid, like Glaucus, or whisk thee down the river, riding, like Arion, on a dolphin's back."

The only answer to this effusion was a horse-laugh from his fellow clerk, who stood holding his sides at the counting-house door, and could not restrain his risible propensities at the thought of the grave and corpulent Mr. Bryant bestriding a fish, instead of his sturdy brown cob, Factotum.

"I smell pitch," resumed Hunter with a look of ineffable disdain. "Hemp and flax, tar, turpentine, and tallow, are an abomination to my nostrils. Into the river let them forth-with be tossed, together with their containing casks and carboys. Faugh! an ounce of civet, good Mr. Apothecary, to sweeten my imagination."

An exclamation from Mrs. Skinner occasioned him for the first time to look up at the

window; but, instead of being daunted into silence by the sight of Helen and Rose, who stood gazing at him in a transfixed amazement, he leaped to the ground, fell upon one knee, extended both his arms, and cried out in an impassioned tone—

“ ‘But soft! what light through yonder window breaks!
It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!
It is my lady! Oh! it is my love.
Oh! that she knew she were!
O speak to me, bright angel! for thou art
Glorious as is a messenger of Heaven,
Unto the white upturned wondering eyes
Of mortals, that fall back to gaze on him,
When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds,
And sails upon the bosom of the air.’

“Thou peerless paragon! thou for whom I have so long sighed in secret! thou who wilt for ever sit enthroned in my heart, why should I not proclaim my love for thee? What are fate, fortune, poverty, or death? Give me but thee, and I defy them all!”

Helen, who, after the letter of the morning,

naturally considered this passionate effusion to be addressed to herself, withdrew hastily from the window, blushing deeply, and her bosom heaving with agitation as she hurried to her own room, murmuring, "Shameful! shameful! Any thing else I could have forgiven; but public brawling, daylight intoxication! such open disgrace! I have done with him—I abandon him to his fate—I discard him utterly and for ever!"

Still more agonizing were the feelings of Rose. Her keener and infallible perceptions had detected that Hunter's eyes had been all along intently riveted upon her's, leaving it impossible for her to doubt that he had been apostrophizing herself and not her friend. In the evident confusion of his mind, he might, indeed, have mistaken the object of his adoration; but it was much more probable that intoxication, a proverbial divulger of truth, had betrayed the secret of his heart; and that,

although he was paying his addresses to Helen, he was in reality enamoured of herself. The conflict of feeling occasioned by this suspicion being more than her debilitated frame could support, she sank upon the sofa in a state of insensibility; while Mrs. Skinner, regretting her inability to afford her any succour, as she was engaged to attend a missionary meeting, quitted the room, and despatched a maid servant to her assistance.

CHAPTER X.

“Sit, worthy friends. My lord is often thus,
And hath been from his youth; pray you keep seat;
The fit is momentary; on a thought
He will be well again.”

SHAKSPEARE.

WHEN we quitted Cypress House and the Lomax family, the latter were enjoying a comparative peacefulness to which they had long been strangers. Happy in the devoted homage of a lover, whose good qualities developed themselves the more copiously as their intimacy increased, Mary, fully reciprocating his attachment, gave free vent to a temperament which was not the less ardent and affectionate, because it was veiled beneath an exterior of habitual sedateness. Her present enjoyment of exist-

ence, enhanced by its novelty, as well as by her delight at the unusual calmness and harmony of her parents, imparted, for the moment, a rare expression of cheerfulness to her features, and animated her whole deportment with a character of exhilaration, which was sustained and increased by the frequent visits, arch congratulations, and vivacious sallies, of her merry friend, Helen Owen.

Lomax, whose more cheerful, or rather less desponding mood, was manifested in an increased hospitality, took refuge from himself in often-repeated dinner parties. From these banquets, in which the host justly vaunted the variety of his rare wines, Jasper Pike was seldom absent.

Though disappointed at not having obtained the hand, or rather the fortune, of Miss Lomax, that feast-smelling worthy saw no reason whatever for abandoning a mansion which held forth the temptation of such frequent and

sumptuous entertainments. Epicure as he was, he rarely indulged his gastronomic propensities at his own cost, and, therefore, set a double value upon gratuitous treats; while other, though not less selfish, motives attracted him to Cypress House. A proficient in almost every game upon the cards, which he had cultivated, not as an amusement, but as a means of profit, he contrived to draw from that source a small, but certain revenue, as he invariably retired from the contest when he found himself pitted against a more skilful adversary, or encountering a run of ill luck.

Lomax, inexpert and yet persevering, because he delighted in any excitement that drew him from his own thoughts, would play piquet with his guest during the greater part of the night, generally losing, and never seeming to regret his ill-fortune. With an apparent, and yet intelligible inconsistency, he at once loved and despised the wealth which he had so

fraudulently obtained, cherishing it as the means of supplying his luxuries, and of procuring him a certain ostensible respect, while he viewed it with disdain since he had discovered its utter insufficiency to secure him safety, health, the real friendship of others, or his own peace of mind.

Among the guests invited to one of these costly dinners, was Captain Bryant, the heir-apparent of Eagle Wharf, and the commander of the Charming Kitty, which vessel had just arrived in the river from a long voyage. The vulgarity that he inherited from both his parents, being in some degree warranted by the rough manners and free and easy deportment for which the sailor claims a professional license, there was something rather pleasing than offensive in his frank and natural demeanour, unpolished as it was.

Perfectly at home when introduced to a numerous assemblage at Cypress House, many of

whom he had never seen before, he saluted the strangers with a good-humoured nod, while his acquaintance had to endure the ordeal of an iron hand, which, in the severity of its kindness, rather crushed than clasped the fingers it imprisoned :—" Glad to see ye, glad to see ye," was his bluff exclamation to the former, " though I never clapped eyes on ye before. We shall wet our whistles together for the first time to-day, but I dare say it won't be the last, for, once a messmate, is always a messmate with Ambrose Bryant, if we have only tossed off a single bowl of grog together. Beg pardon, ladies ! I suppose I ought to talk of nothing but French wines and foreign kickshaws in such a grand room as this. Why, old Cypress House is so transmogrified that I scarcely know it again. Mercy on us ! what rare curtains and cornices ! crimson studding sails with gilt booms ; and, as for looking-glasses, a fellow may see himself in

half a dozen different directions at once, and yet only clap eyes on a single Tom Fool after all. Ask pardon, comrades, I am only speaking for one Ambrose Bryant."

"The furnishing of this drawing-room," said Lomax with an air of pomposity, "cost me some hundreds of pounds, and, therefore, it ought to be handsome. All the materials are of the very best quality; I desired particularly that no cost should be spared; do you admire the taste of the embellishments?"

"No; they are too much like the gilt gingerbread shops at Bartlemy fair. But, I am no judge of these matters, and, besides, I have no taste for any thing just now except for dinner. It smells so savoury that my fingers itch to be at it with the knife and fork. Are we waiting for any body?"

"I believe we are all assembled, with the exception of Mr. Pike."

"What! is Pike coming? Umbrella Pike,

the old beau, as I used to call him, the chap that was always tumbling into scrapes from his over-anxiety to keep out of them? Psha ! never wait for him, man ! Do n't spoil a good dinner for such a good-for-nothing prig as that."

"It is very little beyond the time," observed the lady of the house, and it would look so rude to sit down to dinner without him."

"It's just ten times ruder to keep ten hungry people waiting, only to choke them after all with victuals boiled and roasted to rags. Beg pardon, Mrs. Lomax ; I am sure I need n't ask it from any of our sharp-set messmates, here, but with your permission, I'll ring the bell, that you may order those jack-a-dandy fellows with the long bobs at their shoulders to dish up. Lay all the fault upon me—I know the value of master Jasper Pike."

Of this the speaker gave a practical illustration by snapping his fingers with a most

expressive look of contempt, while the majority of the party corroborated his opinion by various disparaging reflections on the selfishness, cowardice, finical smartness, and affected juvenility, of the expected visiter.

“Whatever we subtract from Mr. Pike’s good qualities,” said Mary, “we ought to add to the talent which enables him, with so few personal recommendations, to become so frequent a guest, both here and at Eagle Wharf.”

“Confound the fellow!” cried the captain, “he would spell for a dinner, even if he didn’t know his alphabet. Besides, he once recommended to my father a speculation in hemp, by which he made a few hundred pounds, and always comes provided with some new suggestion of the sort, when he wants to have a cut at our mutton, taking good care to call when it is nearly roasted.”

“I have a shrewd suspicion,” resumed Mary, “that we all of us like to have a sort of

scapegoat among our acquaintance ; one who is not bad enough to disgrace us, and yet sufficiently unamiable to flatter our self-love, by enabling us to say to ourselves, and to one another, ‘ I thank Heaven that I am not like this Publican.’ ”

“ Can’t tell what others may feel,” replied the sailor, “ but, for my own part, I shouldn’t think it any great compliment to myself to say that I was n’t any such a niggardly, selfish, pragmatical chap as old Pike.”

“ Old ! he is not old,” observed Lomax, a remark which was echoed by the senior Barlow, for, both being themselves somewhat advanced in years, began to speak of middle-aged men as youngsters. “ Nor is he by any means without his good qualities,” continued the former ; “ he plays an excellent hand at piquet.”

“ And he is a capital judge of port-wine,” added old Barlow, who piqued himself upon

the skill with which he had stocked his capacious cellars.

“Ay, ay, I can understand all that,” said Bryant; “he always puffs the wine, that he may have an excuse for drinking more of it, and be asked a second time to dinner. There are many red-nosed old chaps, my father for one, who had much rather that you should praise their port than themselves.”

“Allow me to inform you, Captain Bryant,” said the elder Barlow, with a grave look, “that a man may have a red-nose without being in the smallest degree intemperate.”

“To be sure he may, for I know you hold two or three bottles a day to be no intemperance. Come, come, neighbour, don’t look glum. I owe you a good turn for the way in which you coppered and repaired the Charming Kitty. A better sea-boat never left the Thames.”

“She will surely require docking, again, after so long a voyage,” observed the ship-

builder, who never lost sight of the main chance.

“Why, ay, after getting ashore at Rio, she will want a little overhauling, and I shall warp her down to your dock as soon as I get her cargo out.”

“My good fellow,” cried Barlow, holding out his hand, though not without an anticipatory wince, “how could you imagine that I looked glum at you? Such an old friend, too, as honest Ambrose Bryant! The lower dock, which is now empty, will do for her famously, and we had better have her in before she is visited by the inspectors of Lloyd’s, or she may lose her class in the register-books.”

The announcement of dinner put an end to this conversation; and the guests being marshalled two and two, proceeded to the dining-room, taking precedence according to their presumed wealth, the citizens’ patent of nobility. With the exception of Evelyn and Mary, for

Benjamin was not well enough to join the party, the whole assemblage were avowed lovers of good cheer, so that, after having cast a glance of admiration at the splendid appointments of the table, they betook themselves *con amore* to the serious discussion of the feast spread before them.

Hushed was the human voice divine, except in a few exclamatory eulogia upon the wines and viands, while the clattering of knives and forks, and the smacking of lips, attested the alacrity with which every combatant performed his part in the general demolition of edibles. Already had the fish and soup been removed, and an attack was about to commence on the substantial joints, when the door was thrown open, and Pike swung into the room, springing on his toes with his usual jaunty air, and, perking up his chin as he exclaimed : — “Ten thousand apologies, Mrs. Lomax, and ladies all ! Ever your devoted slave. Mr. Lomax,

and gentlemen, I have the honour to salute you, as they say in France. Ha ! a chair left for me. I see : better late than never. I am glad you sate down without me ; we single young fellows should never be waited for."

" Young !" cried Captain Bryant. " Ha ! ha ! why, you were a single young fellow when I first went to school."

" In general, you are remarkably punctual," said Mrs. Lomax. " I have never yet known you to be wanting after the dinner-hour had struck."

" *I* have," said the captain ; " once when engaged to a public dinner where he was to have paid his quota, upon which occasion he never showed up at all."

" Nay, now, I protest — I appeal — this is unfair, when it is notorious that upon the day in question I was very seriously indisposed."

" Ay, very seriously indisposed to come down with the cash : I believe you there. Ha ! ha !"

“I cannot reply to you now; we do not start fair, for I have all the lost ground of my fish and soup to recover. Let me come up with you, and then I shall be ready for a sparing-match with you or any body. Capital dinner — a prime spread, upon my honour! I shall soon overtake you, captain, for I believe few fellows possess a better set of grinders. He, he, he!”

Having renewed his laugh, merely for the purpose of displaying his teeth, of which he was not a little vain, he plied his knife and fork with such diligence, that he quickly placed himself upon a par with the other guests, when he whispered to his right-hand neighbour:—“Not sorry, after all, to be a little late, for these good people are terribly apt to give me the carving-place, which I abominate. True, the carver may save the best slice for himself, but it is sure to be cold before he can snatch time to eat it. Ever while you live, sit *next* to

the carver, if you can, for there you may intercept the tit bits, and demolish them without interruption."

Acting upon this prudent principle, he had soon satisfied the cravings of his hunger, when, in reply to the inquiries of Lomax, he explained the cause of his impunctuality : — " Why, you see, my good friend, it was too dirty to walk, and coach-hire from the Temple to Bermondsey is no joke, so, as I knew that my friend Sam Ward was going to Greenwich to dinner, and hates driving alone, I kindly offered to fill the vacant place in his gig for a part of the way."

" Or, in other words, you sponged upon him for a cast," said the captain.

" But, when it came to the door," pursued Pike, " I did not at all like the look of his new horse, a tall, rampant, pawing creature, who threw back his ears, which I consider a very bad sign, and glared at me askance, as if he

owed me a personal grudge, which he would take an opportunity of paying off the moment I took my seat behind him. No occasion to run the risk of a kick, so I declined accompanying my friend, and took a boat."

"Wouldn't have been the first time you had been kicked," cried Bryant. "Afraid of every thing but the water, and no great courage in facing that, for, you know, I dare say, what you were born to. Ha ! ha !"

"Got out at London Bridge," continued Pike, without noticing his coarse assailant ; "never shoot the Bridge — too dangerous — took another boat — folded my great coat smooth, and put it under the seat, that it might not get splashed. On arriving at St. Saviour's Dock, the fellow demanded three pence more than his fare, an imposition to which I never submit, not so much for the value of the money, as from a sense of the duty I owe to the public. A squabble ensued, but I carried my point, and

marched off triumphantly. In the eagerness of our dispute, however, I quite forgot my great coat, which I never recollected until I was some distance from the river, and, when I ran back to the stairs, the boatman had disappeared, and I was saluted by a shout of laughter from his vulgar comrades."

"In which I beg leave to join," roared the captain, with a horse-laugh.

With the wine, which seldom fails to promote garrulity, the conversation took a more general turn; and Pike, whose calculating cowardice made him afraid of exciting the smallest unfriendly feeling, even in the most unimportant individual, sought every opportunity of conciliating the captain by fulsome compliments to his personal valour, the nautical profession, and the beauty of the Charming Kitty. Upon the two former subjects no reply was vouchsafed, except an occasional, and not very courteous, exclamation of "Fudge!" or "Humbug!" but

upon the latter point the rough mariner was sensitive, it was his weak side, and he acknowledged his satisfaction, for he was really a good-natured man, by a complacent nod, and the words, " Ay, ay, you may say that, Master Pike ; a finer built brig, or a better sea-boat, never swam, and that's a bold word to say in the presence of old Barlow, considering he didn't build her."

" I know not a more striking proof of the force of habit," observed Mary, " than the sailor's attachment, generally an enthusiastic one, to a life which would seem not only uninviting, but positively repulsive. Who is it that defines a ship to be a floating jail, with the addition of perpetual danger to the lives of the prisoners ? "

" Some landlubber, who didn't know what he was talking about," cried the captain. " Danger ! why we never think about it, and good reason why, for we don't run more risk

than your landsmen when you are mounting a horse, or getting into a stage-coach, or sitting quietly at home. A ship may *go* down, and a horse may *come* down, but neither happens very often, so we are equal upon that score."

"But will you not admit that you are a sort of prisoners?" asked Mary.

"Ay! as a bird is in the air, or a fish in the ocean. Landsmen are prisoners, if you like, for half of them spend their whole lives in the same village or town, and almost all in the same country; but a sailor, who has no tether, no bounds or barriers to restrain him, who is as free and unshackled as the wind that fills his sail, wanders east, west, north, south, wherever his fancy or his duty may lead him; sees every nation under the sun, cares not a rope's end for any, and makes himself at home in all. I tell you what—you may talk of kings and emperors, but I question whether e'er a one of those crowned big wigs

upon his throne feels half so much like a monarch as I do, when I tread the deck of the Charming Kitty, as she spans over the foaming waters at ten or twelve knots an hour, and nothing to be seen on any side but sea and sky, as if she were the only live thing in the world. I should like to know what company is equal to a lonesomeness like this, where I am king of my own crew, and not only master of my own ship, but of the watery world that surrounds me. Why, I feel that I am then indeed a lord of the creation, and could almost fancy myself a demigod, if any such cattle were living in our days. Besides, lookee here—there's not only the grandeur of solitude in such a situation, but, to a certain extent, the pleasure of society, for I know that there's a busy and a pleasant world of fellow-creatures all around me, though I can't clap eyes on 'em; I know that there are lots of friendly hearts and pretty lasses below the horizon, and I have only got to steer

accordingly to come straight into any port I choose, where I may shake the hands of the former, smack the lips of the latter, and empty a cheerful bowl with both—and so pass up the bottle, messmate, for talking makes a fellow dry, and I haven't spun such a long yarn since I made a speech to the underwriters, when they gave me a piece of plate for beating off a French privateer."

"You have compared yourself to a king," resumed Mary, "and you certainly pay one of the unenviable penalties of royalty, in not having any one with whom you can associate on terms of equality. Like Selkirk, in his uninhabited island, you are 'monarch of all you survey;' but the lonesomeness that gives you supremacy must deprive it of its charms, for discipline, I presume, will not allow you to make companions of your crew. Surely a few pleasant passengers would be an agreeable relief to your regal solitude?"

“Why, ay, there’s some sense in that remark,” replied the sailor ; “ first, because there’s no better freight than passage-money, and secondly, because a little live lumber of the gentry kind does certainly save one, now and then, from falling asleep, or having the doldrums during a long calm. In that respect, I was unlucky, for I was to have brought home a friend of my own, only he was taken ill just as I was on the point of sailing. I hope he is hearty again by this time, for I don’t know a pleasanter fellow than honest Ned Ruddock.”

At the mention of this ominous word the uplifted wine glass fell with a smash from the hand of Lomax, who suddenly started upon his feet, and with a look and voice of agonized terror shouted out, “ Who ? who ? what — what name did you mention ? ”

“ Why, that of my friend, Edward Ruddock. Do you know him ? He is coming to England on a very particular business, and I dare say

we shall have him in the river by the next ship."

The muscles of Lomax's face and body, which had previously been in a state of violent tension, became rapidly relaxed, a cold perspiration burst from his forehead, his teeth chattered in his head, and he sank with a tremulous spasm into his chair, inarticulately mumbling the word, "Lost ! lost ! lost !" Presently recovering himself, however, he sprang, as if by a convulsive effort, from his chair, and tottered out of the room, opening and clutching his fingers as he ejaculated, in a hoarse whisper, "Ha ! the key ! the key ! the garden gate ! the garden gate !"

Amazement and consternation were depicted upon the countenances of the visitors, several of whom rose from their chairs ; when Mrs. Lomax, whose usual presence of mind did not fail her, exclaimed with a persuasive and courteous smile, "Let me entreat you to be com-

posed, and to resume your seats. My poor husband is subject to these attacks.”

“But why should the mention of Ned Rud-dock set him off into such a strange tantrum?” asked the captain.

“He was riding with a deceased friend of that name some years ago, when he was thrown from his horse, a concussion of the brain ensued, and the smallest allusion to that terrible accident invariably brings on one of these distressing fits. Excuse me, my friends, and prythee make yourselves at home during my absence. I will return to you as soon as I have administered to my poor patient one of his usual composing-draughts. Mary will do the honours of the table until I re-appear.”

With these words she bowed smilingly to her guests, and quitted the room, casting a significant look at her daughter, as if to warn her that it was necessary to retain all her self-possession in this most critical emergency. Firm

as she usually was, the poor girl found herself utterly unequal to the duty imposed upon her. Not only was she deeply affected by her father's alarming and inexplicable seizure, but the tale so readily invented by her mother filled her with humiliating thoughts, and confirmed her latent suspicions that there must be some dark secret connected with her parents, of which they perpetually dreaded the discovery.

When, therefore, her lover whispered in her ear, "I never heard of your father's terrible accident;" Mary, alike incapable of falsehood or prevarication, could make no other reply than by bursting into tears.

"My dearest Mary!" cried Evelyn, "you tremble — you are overcome — you had better withdraw immediately—let me support you to the door."

Bowing in silence to the company, for she could not trust herself to make an apology, she quitted the room; the rest of the ladies shortly

followed her example ; when Pike, voting himself into the chair, observed that they were bound in common charity to drink a bumper toast to the speedy recovery of their worthy host, whose indisposition none could regret more sincerely than himself. There might be some truth in this, for he had calculated on outstaying the others, and winning eight or ten guineas from him at piquet. As it was not now necessary to keep himself cool and collected for this purpose, he tossed off bumper after bumper, until the bottles were all emptied, and then intruding himself into the chariot of one of the retiring families, with the remark that he scarcely took up any room whatever, and could squeeze himself into any corner, he took possession of the best seat, laughing in his sleeve at the thought of getting a cast as far as Temple Bar, without the cost of a single sixpence.

Quickly dissipated was the bland smile that

had mantled over the features of Mrs. LOMAX, on her quitting the dinner-table, and a look of stern wrath succeeded to it as she hastened to his bed-room in search of her husband. He was not there, but, on recollecting his broken exclamations, which afforded her a clue to his probable movements, she descended the stairs, and, passing into the garden, hurried, by the light of the moon, towards the gate at its opposite extremity.

At the sound of her approaching footsteps, the terror-stricken fugitive, who had sought to make his escape in that direction, sunk cowering to the ground, without daring to raise his eyes, hoarsely whispering, "I surrender—I could not get out—I have lost the key—I have lost the key!"

"Lost your wits, you mean," exclaimed the wife, with a look of unutterable scorn and indignation. "Pitiful, self-betraying wretch! would that I could crush you with my foot

when you thus lie prostrate, and coil yourself up like a reptile, as you are ! ”

“ Jane ! ” ejaculated Lomax, somewhat reassured by the voice of his wife, “ is it you—are you alone—quite, quite alone ?—No constable—no Bow-street officer ? ”

“ Chicken-hearted fool ! raise up your eyes and see, unless you are struck blind as well as mad. Idiot that I was, to league myself with so perilous an accomplice as a snivelling coward, whose imbecility—baugh !—I sicken to think of your loathsome and abject—up, thou unmanly creature, and hie thee to bed, lest thou shouldst further shame and expose thyself and me. Up, I say ! ”

“ Nay, now, dear Jane ! ” murmured the partner of her guilt, as he raised himself slowly upon his legs with the assistance of the gate, “ do not upbraid me—the deed was your suggestion—not mine. It was you who—and, besides, I have not your courage, and

never shall have. There is something terrible in your defiance of danger — no, no spirit of darkness could display a more determined audacity. It amazes me ; I cannot understand it.”

“ Because *you* feel and think like a woman, and *I* like a man. Still trembling, still shrinking with alarm when a leaf rustles in the wind ! Fool and dastard ! lean upon me ; we must not be longer missed from the house. Hush ! speak not a word ; keep your tongue quiet within those rattling teeth ; you have sufficiently endangered yourself, me, and our children, for one night. Come on ! ”

“ Ruddock is coming home,” groaned Lomax, scarcely conscious of what he was uttering—
“ it is he who will expose us. The Lord have mercy upon me ! I shall die upon a gibbet ! ”

“ By Heaven ! ” exclaimed his wife, firmly grasping his arm, with both her hands, “ I

will myself inform against you, and deliver you over instantly to the officers of justice, if you speak another word on this forbidden subject."

"Have pity on me, dear Jane; I scarcely know what I say or do. Lend me your arm, and I will try to reach the house."

He made the attempt accordingly, and they were proceeding, slowly and in silence, when the shadow of a waving tree was wafted towards them, along the gravel walk, and Lomax, starting in an agony of terror, inarticulately muttered, "Ha! it is he—it is he! I saw the tall thin man in the low—"

"Wretch!" interposed his companion, stopping his mouth with her hand, "remember my threat—I will not be trifled with;—be silent, or by Heaven, you are a dead man! If you must needs be more frightened at shadows than I should be at realities, shut your coward eyes, and suffer me to lead you back."

Quailed by the stern energies of his accomplice, Lomax obeyed in silence, and tottered forwards until they passed beneath the deep shade of the great cypress tree, at the back of the house. As they emerged from it into the light of a cloudless moon, their figures presented a singular contrast, not only to each other, but to the scene that surrounded them.

Ever fortified and braced up to resistance by a conviction of danger, the wife advanced with a firm step, an erect attitude, and a countenance that seemed to defy not only all earthly dangers, but the very light of heaven that irradiated her fixed, resolute, and marble-like features.

Dauntless, but not rash or desperate, she glanced calmly and vigilantly around her, anxious to reach the house without exciting any avoidable observation or suspicion. Her rich dress, and the flashing of the jewels

in her hair, for she had rushed out without altering her attire, gave her the semblance of a tragic heroine, conscious that she was surrounded with perils of all sorts, and yet fully prepared to confront the worst extremity of fate or fortune.

To the arm of this impersonation of fortitude, or rather of impenitent audacity, clung her still shuddering husband, cowering down with a hang-dog look, till he was almost half double, involuntarily opening and clutching his fingers, his eyes firmly closed, a cold perspiration on his brow, his thoughts scared and bewildered, and his heart sinking within him, even at the chattering of his own teeth, and the creaking of his shoes as he crept furtively along upon his tiptoes.

Opposite as were these effects of a joint crime upon a powerful and an imbecile mind, they were still more at variance with the features of nature as displayed within the nar-

row precincts of the enclosure through which the guilty pair were passing. There all was peace and tranquillity : the stars were quietly twinkling in the serene heavens ; the moon looked placidly down upon the circular grass-plot, spangling the dew, and silvering the ever-greens that embowered it ; while the low, indistinct sounds, wafted at intervals from the distant haunts of men, gave additional intensity to the succeeding silence that brooded over the seclusion of the garden, to which the dark wide-spreading cypress imparted an additional character of peaceful solemnity.

By threading the plantation that adjoined the house, Mrs. Lomax reached a side door unobserved, passed up the back stairs, and made her way to her own room, still supporting her husband, who threw himself upon the bed with a deep groan, and instantly drew the clothes over him as if he would hide himself from every eye.

In this position she left him ; and, cautiously locking the door behind her as she quitted the apartment, returned to the dining-room, where a few of the guests, whose carriages had not yet arrived, were still remaining. Apologising, with a courteous smile and an air of perfect composure, for the disturbance that had been so unexpectedly occasioned, she declared that she had left the invalid much better, again adverted to the unfortunate accident which had subjected him to these distressing attacks, and then, turning the conversation to indifferent subjects, continued chatting, unconcernedly, with her friends, until they had all taken their departure.

Although she had thus adroitly hushed the suspicions, and counteracted the mischief, which this untoward occurrence at first threatened to produce, she could not restore to the mind of her husband the comparative tranquillity in which his senses had been lately steeped. That

predominance to which he had hitherto quietly submitted, in the conviction of his wife's superior courage and talent, now lost its influence ; the return of Ruddock, and all the frightful consequences to which it might lead, haunted him both by day and by night, filling him with such profound horror, that his faculties threatened to give way ; his somnambulism returned ; he saw spectral gibbets and phantasmal hangmen, and raved incessantly about instant flight to America, or some still more remote quarter of the earth.

In vain did his confederate argue that they had no reason whatever for supposing that Ruddock doubted or meant to dispute the will, even if he returned to England, which was by no means certain, since he had been left seriously indisposed in a climate notoriously fatal to European constitutions, and might, not improbably, deliver them finally from all their apprehensions by his death. In vain did she

implore her husband, by his duty and affection as a father, to struggle with the growing madness of his terror, and to defer all thoughts of ignominious flight, which was of itself equivalent to a confession of guilt, at least until they should have accomplished the marriage of their daughter, whose settlement in life, if there were the smallest foundation for his fears, it was now ten thousand times more than ever incumbent upon him to secure. His natural selfishness, rendered paramount and intense by a blind dismay, incapacitated him alike from reasoning, or from being in the smallest degree affected by any other feeling than the absorbing consideration of his own flight, his own safety, and the transmission abroad of his unjustly acquired wealth, for the future gratification of his own sensuality.

With this view he stole out in the evenings, for he was afraid to trust himself in the streets or to face his fellow-creatures during the day,

and made inquiries at the water-side respecting the vessels that would soonest sail for America, while he summoned his broker to Cypress House, that he might consult him about converting his funded property into gold, or American stock.

Too vigilant not to have quickly discovered these proceedings, and cherishing a latent suspicion that her mean-spirited partner might attempt to abscond with whatever property he could collect, and leave his whole family in the lurch, Mrs. Lomax found herself in a dilemma of the most painful and harassing description.

Any thing that was likely to interfere with Mary's pending and most desirable marriage was above all things to be avoided, while she felt scarcely less solicitous to prevent any sudden change, either in their mode of life or place of residence, which, by disturbing the keen sensibility, might aggravate the illness of her

darling Benjamin, whose rapidly increasing debility now began, for the first time, to fill her with apprehension and anguish.

With such powerful motives for wishing to control her husband, and detach him from his perilous designs, it is difficult to describe her vexation, when she discovered that he had thrown off the yoke of her authority, and become totally unmanageable. A mightier terror had now swallowed up his fear of his wife ; Ruddock, the dreaded Ruddock was the present master of his fate and actions ; and he prosecuted his covert plans for quitting the country with a craft which it was difficult to detect, and a dogged stubbornness which, when his purpose was discovered, it was impossible to subdue.

How to manage so intractable a subject, how to frustrate his secret machinations, or the danger of his life-involving indiscretions, how, in short, to avert the ruin that seemed to be im-

pending over the prospects of Mary, and the prosperity of the whole family, awakened the most intense anxiety in the mind of Mrs. Lomax.

In a difficulty of this nature, courage, which she possessed even to desperation, was not of the smallest avail. Not less fertile, however, in contriving expedients, than dauntless in executing them, she quickly devised a plan which extricated her for the moment from the perils with which she was environed. We have recorded that Lomax, urged by the advice, and assisted by the vigilance of his wife, had latterly been practising a rare temperance in his potations. Under the pretext that his health now required a relaxation of this restraint, she indulged him in his favourite wines, drugging his evening posset with an opiate which usually plunged him into a heavy sleep for the remainder of the night. Delighted at this recurrence to his favourite habits, and still more so at the mental lethargy that made him in-

sensible to the daily terrors and spectral dreams by which he had been haunted, the wretched man consented to be confined to his own room, dosing and drinking away his time in a sottish unconsciousness of its lapse.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Lomax, who gave out that the invalid was affected with a trifling nervous indisposition, for which quietude and a temporary seclusion had been prescribed, exhibited so calm a demeanour, and alluded to her husband's inopportune seizure with such an apparent unconcern, that any vague suspicions which it might have been calculated to excite were effectually lulled.

Successful as she had been in thus hoodwinking her friends, she did not less feel the importance of accelerating a marriage with which so many critical and unforeseen casualties might interfere. The father of the lover, a keen, penetrating man of business, might make inquiries of which it was impossible to

anticipate the result ; Lomax, bursting from his confinement in a fit of terror or intoxication, might ruin all by some fearful revelation ; Rud-dock might, in very truth, return to claim his usurped property ; or the will might be challenged, and a suit instituted in his behalf, a circumstance of which it would be impossible to suppress the public knowledge.

Impressed with these convictions, Mrs. Lomax expedited all the preliminary arrangements, and exerted herself to prevent any unnecessary delay in the completion of the marriage. It is scarcely necessary to state that her object was warmly advocated by Evelyn Barlow ; his parents willingly lent themselves to the wishes of their son ; while Mary, whose bosom had been haunted, ever since her father's fit of terror at the dinner-table, with an undefined and most oppressive misgiving that some catastrophe or disclosure might dash the proffered cup of happiness from her lips, felt

an indescribable load removed from her heart, when the settlements were mutually agreed upon and prepared, and the day of her nuptials was at last fixed.

CHAPTER XI.

“ Think not I love him, though I ask for him ;
’Tis but a peevish boy: yet he talks well,
But, what care I for words? Yet words do well,
When he that speaks them pleases those that hear.”

SHAKSPEARE.

WE return to Eagle Wharf, both of whose fair and young inmates had struggled with sleeplessness and distressing thoughts, on the night that followed Hunter’s intoxication, and the degrading exposure of which it had been the occasion. Only a few minutes before that unlucky affair, Helen, apparently conquered by the arguments and persuasions of her friend, though her heart had previously surrendered at discretion, had agreed to grant an interview

with her lover, and to accept his suit, if he could remove certain imputations, to which she herself attached little or no credit.

One of these charges, that of his occasional indulgence in deep potations, was now flagrantly established; the others might receive a similar confirmation; under such circumstances, her judgment repudiated the idea of acknowledging him as a claimant for her hand, and yet, such is the perversity of the female mind when it is warped by the affections, she felt herself, in spite of her reason and her convictions, more warmly and more invincibly prepossessed in his favour than ever.

Of this apparent inconsistency she either could not or would not detect the real cause; but the penetrative reader will be at no loss to discover that it arose from the impassioned language which she had supposed to be addressed to herself, when Hunter had apostrophized her as the idolized object for whom he

had long sighed in secret, the peerless paragon for whose possession he was willing to encounter every extremity of fate. Much as she regretted the disreputable inebriety under which this declaration was made, it afforded a welcome antidote to the coldness that had offended her in his letter. That he was in love with her, deeply, sincerely, passionately, and without the impulse of sordid motives—for intoxication draws forth the genuine and disinterested feelings of the heart—she now believed it impossible to doubt; and in that cherished conviction, the more she reflected upon his misconduct, the less did she find herself disposed to punish it by denying him her presence, and withdrawing from him the favour she had hitherto conceded, though she might hesitate, and insist upon full satisfaction of all her misgivings, before she could grant a decided encouragement to his suit.

Poor Rose, in the mean time, was passing a

weeping night in a contest of feelings sometimes sharply distressing, sometimes redeemed by soothing hopes and lofty aspirations. Not for one instant could her acute perceptions be deceived. Hunter's ebriety, which she attributed to some temporary and excusable excitement, had disclosed the real state of his affections. For her, and not for Helen, had his passionate love effusion been intended—a fact rendered not less indisputable by his eyes than by his language. She herself was still the secret mistress of his heart, while he was openly paying his addresses to her friend. Ought she to condemn him for this? Oh, no, no! She did justice to his real motives, to his forbearance, to his magnanimity, and could not only forgive, but pity, admire, and imitate him. Never seeking to win *her* affections, he had been perpetually struggling to conceal and subdue his own. With a noble generosity, worthy of his exalted character, he had de-

terminated to sacrifice his misplaced passion on the shrine of filial and fraternal duty, not altogether uninfluenced, perhaps, by the discovery that he had unintentionally awakened a tender interest in the bosom of Helen.

In the midst of fast-flowing tears, the high-souled girl felt a proud pleasure in the thought of surrendering up all the sweet though secret wishes of her own heart, and dedicating herself to the felicity of her friends. "I am sure they will all be happy," she inarticulately sobbed:—"very, very happy, and what ought I to wish for more? As for me, *my* fate is immaterial. I am alone — an orphan — and I shall have one consolation of which nothing can deprive me. I may feel my sorrows and my solitude for a time ; but my failing health, my attenuated frame, my withering heart, every thing tells me, and most welcome are the tidings, that I shall not feel them long."

When they encountered each other in the

morning, the looks of both friends bore evidence of their having passed an anxious and restless night, but in every other respect their expression was different. Helen's countenance was agitated by alternations of restlessness, irresolution, and pensive dejection ; while the wan and spiritual face of her friend, in spite of its jaded aspect, wore the composure of one whose soul is made up to a fixed, an exalted, an inflexible purpose. It was clear that the mind had triumphed over the strength of her affection, and the weakness of her frame, but it was equally manifest that the victory had not been achieved without a desolating ravage.

A silence of some continuance, which both felt to be embarrassing, but which neither could summon resolution to dispel, was at length broken by Helen's exclaiming, with an assumed air of indifference : — “ I need not disclose to you my thoughts, dear Rose, for I know your faculty of divining them. Tell me,

were your's taking the same direction as mine?"

"Yes; for I was thinking of Mr. Hunter's letter."

"Right! Whether it be sympathy or intention, I know not, but you can always dive into my mind. I must send some answer to it, I suppose; and yet I scarcely know that it deserves any notice whatever, after the unbecoming behaviour of which we were witnesses last night."

"Not unbecoming in every sense," said Rose, with a languid smile; "for methinks your admirer never appeared half so handsome. The flush of his usually pale cheeks heightened the brilliancy of his eyes; a joyous hilarity had chased away the habitual dejection of his countenance; and, as he sate, not ungracefully upon his temporary throne, his noble features, radiant in the sun, and his locks waving in the wind, the very *beau-ideal* of tipsiness; he

might almost have been taken for the beautiful Bacchus returning in triumph from his Indian expedition."

"Psha! what are the man's looks or demeanour to the purpose? You do not mean to assert that intoxication can ever be becoming."

"Certainly not; but neither can you yourself deny that Mr. Hunter's inebriety, however ungentlemanly may be the offence, which is one that I dream not of vindicating, manifested itself after a gentlemanly fashion. Exalted as he was, his voice lost not its winning melody; and his real nature, which upon these occasions throws off all disguise, came forth to the light without exhibiting a single vulgar or unworthy trait. Even in his unconsciousness, his classical and poetical mind gave a redeeming colour to his effusions, and he could talk of nothing but the beautiful fictions of Greece, or the still more exquisite imaginings of our matchless Shakspeare."

“ A precious apology truly ! So, then drunkenness, the vilest of all vices, is to stand excused, if it display itself in the extravagant gesticulations and fustian hyperboles of a moon-struck player.”

Of the sin I offer no defence ; I only maintain that it brings forth the real character of the sinner, and that Mr. Hunter, in that temporary loss of reason, which leads many men, according to the vulgar saying, to make beasts of themselves, suffered no worse metamorphosis than to be transformed from a wharf clerk into the poetical and sun-crowned monarch of an enchanted island.”

“ Why, it must be confessed,” said Helen, who, as usual, had been affecting more indignation than she really felt, in order to provoke from her companion a vindication of her lover ; “ it must be confessed that his exaltation improved his appearance, and that a little excess in wine, a casual tipsiness, is less offensive

when it takes this ridiculous but elevating turn, than when it stupifies or vulgarizes its victim. I am not surprised that he should apostrophize me as Miranda, when he saw by my side so perfect an impersonation of the beautiful and sylph-like Ariel ; but, if my ears deceived me not, he boasted, in the hearing of the gibing clerk and porters, that he would espouse me, and bear me off to be the queen of his imaginary Barataria. How can I ever pardon such public and flagrant impertinence ?”

“By recollecting that he knew not, and could not, therefore, mean what he said,” replied Rose, blushing, and thrilling in the secret conviction that the audacious declaration was intended for herself, and not for her friend. “Surely it requires no great stretch of mercy to forgive an unintentional transgression.”

“A mere verbal insolence, uttered in a moment of unconsciousness, it is not, indeed,

difficult to overlook ; but the tipsiness could not be unintentional, and you yourself have declared it to be an indefensible vice."

"Yes, where it is habitual and voluntary ; but I can imagine fifty circumstances that may extenuate, if not wholly excuse, a solitary offence of the kind ; and I could almost pledge my life that Mr. Hunter's will prove to have been an accidental and vindicable excess."

"Indeed ! are you serious in thus pledging yourself for the sobriety of your client ? Yes, I see you are : your earnest, imploring eyes, your quivering lips, assure me that you believe implicitly in his ability to acquit himself. But, recollect, dear Rose, that you are *my* advocate, as well as his, ay, and by a much dearer and tenderer tie than any that he can urge ; and tell me candidly, my sweet friend and counsellor, how would you have me act in this awkward predicament. What am I to do with this saucy epistle ? Am I to consider it

as a serious offer of his hand, or conclude that it was written under the influence of deep potations, and so toss it into the fire, to be no more seen or thought of than the fumes that engendered it?"

"You are trifling, Helen, and the occasion does not authorise levity. You yourself do not believe it to have been penned under any other inspiration than that of a settled purpose and a deep feeling. Your course of action is too clearly indicated to admit of doubt or deviation. It is first indispensable that ——. Hist! hark! I hear footsteps approaching — it is Samuel's tread."

"I can distinguish no sound, but your senses are so keen that if you chose to enact the part of Fine-ear in the fairy tale, I verily believe you would hear the grass springing out of the ground."

The accuracy of Rose's auditory nerves was presently confirmed by the entrance of the

servant, who again left the room, after having placed a letter in the hands of Helen. "From Mr. Hunter," exclaimed the latter, colouring deeply as she glanced at the superscription. "Now, my fairy Mentor, how am I to act? Shall I break the seal, or return it, together with his love-letter, or rather with his offer of marriage, which is no love-letter, under a blank cover?"

"Ridiculous question! this is mere coquetry—the affectation of an indifference which you do not, cannot, feel. If I thought you capable of so much mingled rudeness and cruelty, I should from that moment cease to recognize you as my friend."

"Heyday!" exclaimed Helen, somewhat abashed at the detection of her own insincerity, and not a little surprised at the sudden vehemence of her companion, "your zeal transports you from an advocate into a combatant. Well, then, since I have your sanction, not to

say your command, I will e'en break the seal, and see whether our king of the enchanted island can adduce any valid reason why he should not be fined five shillings and set in the stocks for drunkenness."

Unable as she had been to read the letter without a deep and manifest emotion, Helen exclaimed with an affected air of unconcern, although in a faltering voice, "Well, my little sorceress, have you again divined the contents of this epistle in my tell-tale countenance, or shall I submit it to your inspection?"

"Since you offer me your confidence, I must confess that the latter would be a much more satisfactory course."

So saying, Rose took the paper, and cast her eyes rapidly over its contents, which were to the following purport.

"The miseries of a sleepless night, of a disordered frame, of remorseful and most humiliating reflections, I could endure with some degree

of patience, for I have deserved them all; but the torments of suspense upon a point which must decide my whole future course of life, and, above all, the fear that I may seem, in the eyes of Miss Owen, infinitely more debased and culpable than I really am—these, these are sufferings which become the more intolerable the more I reflect upon them. The defence, or at least the extenuations, that I can offer for my temporary madness must be stated personally to be understood, for I am too miserable, too impatient, too agitated, to commit them to paper. By your regard for justice, for mercy, I implore you to grant me a short interview. It will be the last time, unless with your special permission, that you will ever be addressed by the almost heart-broken

“ALFRED HUNTER.”

“P. S. One more favour. If you allow me to call upon you, which I believe you are too

just, too generous to refuse, may I request you to name an hour when I shall not be likely to encounter Mr. Bryant. He has dismissed me from my employment; he had a full right to do so, since I was every way unfitted for it; but he has accompanied this measure with coarse and contumelious language, to which I find it difficult to submit. My temper, as I fear you must have observed, has latterly become hasty, and I would not knowingly expose myself to the chance of forgetting the disparity of our years, the relation in which we stand, or the gratitude that I owe him for his past favours.

“A. H.”

Vain were the struggles of Rose to conceal her agitation, as she read, or rather devoured, the contents of the letter. In spite of the forced compression of her lips, the muscles around her mouth were involuntarily convulsed, and, as she lifted up her face to return the

paper, her companion perceived that she was weeping.

“Heavens!” ejaculated Helen, “what can have occasioned this deep emotion? I saw nothing so very affecting in what Mr. Hunter has written.”

Rose made no reply until she had somewhat mastered her feelings, when she exclaimed:—
“Ah, Helen! you did not see, you did not notice, what I had detected before I began its perusal. Look at it again, and you will perceive that the paper is in various places marked with his ——, marked with his ——.” Again she hesitated, and several seconds elapsed before she could indistinctly murmur the word “tears.”

“Poor fellow!” ejaculated Helen, as her eye fell upon the spots which she had previously overlooked.

“Poor fellow!” repeated Rose, but in a tone infinitely more soft and tender than that of her

companion. "You *must* see him ; you *must* grant his request," she continued after a pause.

"*Must !*" cried Helen ; "I do n't see the necessity, and I very much doubt the prudence, of such a step. I do n't like the tone of this letter. It exhibits peevishness at the detection, rather than penitence for the commission, of his offence. He confesses himself, you see, to be of a hasty temper."

"Which is often, dear Helen, the best evidence of keen apprehension and sensitive feelings. Judge not of him by his present deranged state. Grant his request, hear his vindication, give him hope, and I will answer for his temper, because I know the goodness of his heart and the soundness of his principles."

"Then you know more of him than I do. Can you deny his pride, his haughtiness, at the very moment when he ought to be the most humble ? See how he speaks of my uncle !"

"As there are elastic substances which only

spring upwards when pressed, so there are noble minds which assert their independence most strenuously when Fortune seems the most resolved to crush them. Mr. Hunter has lost his appointment : blighted hopes, ruin, a sense of self-abasement, combine to distress and overwhelm him. Would you trample upon a fallen man ? With an impassioned solemnity, he declares that he can extenuate his misconduct. He is entitled to a hearing. A rash and uncharitable judgment is often a worse offence than that which it blindly condemns. Helen, I appeal to yourself — you must, you will — you shall — see him.”

“ *Shall* is a strong word, my little dictatress, and your reddening cheeks assure me that your feelings are not less vehement than your language ; but, surely, surely, my dear Rose, you overlook the impertinence of his asking me to grant him a clandestine interview, for my hero, it seems, will not cross the threshold if

the owner of the house be within it. Only consider the indecorum, the indelicacy, the gross impropriety, of my acceding to his request."

"Would you expose him or your uncle to a squabble in the present irritated state of their feelings? Mr. Hunter, I think, has shown much discretion in wishing to avoid any such painful collision, and, as to yourself, there can be nothing clandestine, still less indelicate, in your seeing him, since I am made acquainted with your interview."

"Am I to understand that you wish to be a party to it?" asked Helen with an arch smile, "because in that case ——."

"O no—no—no," interposed Rose, in some confusion; "but, as you make me your *confidante*, there can be nothing covert or clandestine in the affair. Witnesses are seldom very welcome, I believe, in the meetings and explanations of lovers."

"Lovers! I cannot recognize that term

when applied to myself. At present, the reciprocity is of a somewhat Irish character. It is all on one side."

"It will not long continue so, if Mr. Hunter, as I confidently anticipate, can explain and extenuate his recent act of intemperance."

In this manner the discussion was maintained for some time, Helen, as before, urging objections for the very purpose of having them refuted, and of obtaining a sanction to the secret wishes of her heart; Rose, penetrating with her customary acuteness into her friend's motives, and conducting her, by the pride-saving road of apparent conviction and concession, to the point at which she had all along been wishing to arrive. The result of this mutual *finesse* between parties usually so frank and unreserved, was the concoction and transmission of the following brief note to the object of their joint solicitude.

"Miss Owen presents her compliments to

Mr. Hunter, and begs to inform him, in answer to his application, that she will be at home between one and two o'clock this morning.

“Eagle Wharf. Thursday.”

Short as it was, this reply had not been adopted without much debating. Helen's sense of propriety and delicacy being somewhat revolted by the idea of making an assignation, she resolved that the terms of her compliance should be as formal and frigid as possible, and she accordingly wrote to her lover, as if she were making an appointment with a tradesman.

It was known that both Mr. and Mrs. Bryant would be absent at the hour mentioned, a circumstance, however, to which she did not make the smallest allusion, conceiving it derogatory to lend herself to any thing that wore an underhand appearance.

Whether her demeanour upon this occasion was consistent with strict rectitude, and her character for a frank straightforwardness, can best be decided by such female casuists as may themselves have been in love. Rose, who was too well satisfied with the matter to object to the manner, took care to guard against any change of purpose on the part of her friend, who had displayed more irresolution than she really felt, by instantly despatching the note to its destination.

A suspense more trying than that to which Helen was exposed, while expecting the arrival of her suitor, it would be difficult to imagine. Her judgment and her affections were at open warfare. Even if the object of her partiality, for she no longer attempted to disguise from herself the real state of her heart, should triumphantly rebut every charge adduced against him, she was well aware that her guardian and all her friends, with the single exception of

Rose, would condemn an union which in a worldly sense might be pronounced signally disadvantageous.

This objection, however, made but small and fleeting impression upon her mind. Sordid considerations of any sort were utterly foreign to her nature ; delighting in generous actions, and a magnanimous liberality, the thought of redeeming Mr. Hunter from the degradation that saddened his soul, of lifting him up now that he was fallen and friendless, and of replacing him in his original and proper sphere, had at once elevated and entranced her bosom in many an hour of sweet and solitary musing. It did so now, but less uninterruptedly than before, for the bright vision was clouded with menacing shapes that would not be put aside.

All the alleged evil habits of the coming visiter threw their shadows before ; his misdeeds, and above all the fatal intoxication, of which she had been an eye-witness, rose up in judgment

against him ; and the result was a firm determination not to suffer her feelings to be entrapped, but to subject the culprit to a most severe and searching scrutiny, when he came up for judgment, and to dismiss him for ever from her thoughts, should he not come out from the ordeal with a character that would justify her regard. Strange as it may appear, we are, nevertheless, bound to record that, during this mental conflict, which might have seemed painful enough to absorb all her attentions, she found time to make frequent reference to her looking-glass, and had just altered the arrangement of her hair for the third time, when Mr. Hunter was announced.

How vain are the cold resolves of the judgment, how rapidly does their icy barrier melt away, when smitten by the electric fire of the feelings ! Dispelled in an instant were all the stern resolves of Helen, as she marked the wretched appearance of her lover. His looks

were haggard, his hair and dress disordered, his complexion wan and sodden ; his swollen eyes recalled the tear-drops she had noticed in his letter, and his whole aspect confirmed the truth of his declaration that he was almost heart-broken. “ Good heavens, Mr. Hunter ! ” she exclaimed in a tone of mingled alarm and compassion, “ how ill you look ! what is the matter ? ”

“ I cannot look worse than I feel, for I am sick, sick at heart, sick with the bitterness of the soul,” replied her lover in a hollow voice. “ O Miss Owen ! If I do not throw myself upon my knees to implore, to supplicate, your pardon, believe me when I assure you that my heart is bowed down to the ground with sorrow and remorse, and that my spirit lies prostrate before you. I am overwhelmed, crushed, with a sense of humiliation, and with a profound anguish of soul, which you must gather from my looks rather than my language. Most

humbly do I entreat you to forgive me, if, in a moment of oblivion, unconsciousness, temporary madness, I uttered a syllable that could imply a feeling of disrespect towards one who possesses my entire —— my entire ——.”

He paused in an evident embarrassment, from which Helen hastened to relieve him. Touched as she was by the affecting humility of a spirit usually so proud and unbending, she had had time to recover from her first surprise, and her air was reserved, almost chilling, as she replied:—
“I am not aware, sir, however indecorous might be your demeanour, that you uttered any thing, so far as I am concerned, of an unpardonable nature. When a man forgets what is due to himself, he is little likely to remember what is due to others. That I was equally shocked, sorry, and surprised at the indecorous spectacle of which I was an involuntary witness, I will not deny; but I can, nevertheless, forgive you, if you can so far explain or ex-

tenuate its origin as to be fairly enabled to forgive yourself."

"I can, I can, and it is for this purpose that I have sought our present interview. Oh, judge me not, I beseech you, by one solitary instance of inebriety: yes, I repeat, solitary, single, as unprecedented as it will be unfollowed. By nature I am temperate, I might almost say abstemious. In this there is little merit, for there is no self-denial: my sobriety is constitutional. Never did I indulge in wine, even when I possessed the means; and latterly I have never tasted it except when I have taken an occasional glass in this very house."

"Strange, then, that you should have been tempted to commit excess in the broad light of day."

"Strange, but not inexplicable, if you will deign to listen to me. Among other effects saved from the wreck of my late father's property and my own, was a hamper of Madeira,

valued less for its own sake than for that of its donor, an East India captain, and an old friend of the family. Expressly reserved for joyous days, I need not say that it has hitherto remained intact, for our domestic calendar, since our unhappy reverses, has not known a single festival. Yesterday, however, Mr. Holloway, to whom my sister is betrothed, took an early dinner with us, previously to his returning to the country. Elated by new and cheering prospects, for there was a hope that the unhappy bar which has so long prevented his marriage was about to be removed, he gaily proposed that we should try the contents of the unopened hamper, a suggestion to which I willingly acceded. I, myself, was in a high state of excitement; I had just written a letter—I hope you have not been offended by it.—a letter on which the fate of my whole future life was to depend; and hopes, idle and presumptuous, I fear, but not the less agitating,

contended in my bosom with the most painful misgivings. We drank to each other's success, a toast which it was difficult not to repeat and to reiterate, and my heated blood, for I was previously feverish with anxiety, becoming more and more inflamed, I sought to quench its fire by fresh bumpers. Still, my potations were by no means deep, but I was unused to them ; and the hurry with which I accompanied my friend to the Borough, to see him into the stage that was to convey him away, completed the disorder of my faculties. Of what occurred after my return to the Wharf, I retain no recollection whatever. Would to Heaven that it could be blotted from the minds of others as effectually as it is from my own ! I have done ; I have nothing further to urge in extenuation of my misdeed, than to remind you that it was partly occasioned by my anxiety on your account, and to repeat that, had I been an habitual toper, nay, had I even been accustomed

to moderate potations, I should not have been so suddenly and completely overcome."

"It has been altogether a most untoward affair," said Helen, endeavouring to conceal beneath a demure look her delight at his satisfactory exculpation; "but, as you really seem to have been more unfortunate than culpable, and have made a much better defence than I had supposed possible, I have no hesitation in saying ——, I am willing to confess—in short, so far as I myself am concerned, I freely forgive you."

"Do you?—can you?—is it possible? But I need not be surprised; you are all goodness, all condescension, all generosity, a conviction which emboldens me to ——."

He hesitated; when Helen, suspecting that he was about to urge his suit, and not wishing to decide upon it until he should have furnished all the explanations she required, exclaimed:—"I have before heard that some painful and

hitherto insuperable difficulty prevented the completion of your sister's marriage. May I inquire its nature?"

Hunter frankly detailed the whole history of her engagement, and of the unfortunate circumstance that had indefinitely postponed her nuptials, justifying his motives in counselling her to embark her little portion in speculation, but bitterly condemning his rashness and want of judgment in selecting an adventure which had been attended with such disastrous consequences.

"I cannot better show my sense of your straightforwardness and candour than by imitating it," said Helen; "and, since you have voluntarily placed yourself on your defence, I may, perhaps, stand excused if I mention all the other improprieties that I have heard laid to your charge."

These she accordingly recapitulated without hesitation, laying particular stress on his imputed addiction to gambling and to improper

company, as well as on his general improvidence. Admitting his infatuation as to the purchase of lottery-tickets, always in the sanguine hope of restoring the fortunes of his mother and sister, he cleared himself most triumphantly from every other inculpation, explaining such circumstances as had appeared equivocal in his conduct, avowing his errors wherever he felt himself to be in fault, and exhibiting throughout his whole vindication a demeanour so manly, dignified, and ingenuous, coupled with a modesty, contrition, and sensibility so truly touching, that Helen, who thought he had never appeared to half so much advantage, thrilled with a generous exultation which she found it almost impossible to conceal, while her heart beat vehemently, but with a grateful pulsation, in the delightful assurance that all its tender predilections were abundantly justified, all its occasional misgivings effectually and finally dispelled.

“And, now, Miss Owen,” resumed Hunter, ‘now that I have extenuated, as I hope, my admitted errors and irregularities, and rebutted the injurious calumnies with which I had been assailed, may I stand acquitted of presumption or vanity, if I venture to declare my belief that I must still appear to you somewhat less deserving than I really am? We are all the creatures of circumstances; and much of my infirmity of temper, and perhaps all my irregularities of conduct, may be traced to this source. Under happier auspices, all these defects, if I know any thing of my own disposition, will be torn up by the roots and destroyed for ever, to leave me, as I trust, a wiser and a better man. My principles have never been justly arraigned, and it is because I feel myself not every way unworthy of you—pardon my arrogance in saying so—because I know that I should devote myself, heart and soul, to your happiness—because I cherish the confident hope

of succeeding in this object, that I have dared to become a suitor for your hand, and now humbly await your decision upon my future destiny."

With all Helen's vivacity and plain good sense, there was, as we have already stated, a touch of the sentimental, and even of the romantic, in her disposition, which was powerfully developed whenever a particular chord was made to vibrate. Any thing generous, great, magnanimous, instantly awoke her sympathies ; and the instances of this nature which she had encountered in real life, or in the course of her reading, immediately fired her with the ambition of imitating them.

Here was an occasion, as it appeared to her, for partially realizing her dormant aspirations. There would be something noble as well as rare in bestowing her hand and fortune upon "a brave man struggling with the storms of fate;" in selecting him, despite the antici-

pated opposition of her guardian and all the world, and in securing the marriage and happiness of her friend Harriet.

Perhaps the state of her affections kindled this generous enthusiasm ; and it certainly lent a peculiar sweetness to her smile and tone, as she exclaimed with downcast eyes, and some little hesitation : — “ Once more, Mr. Hunter, I will imitate your candour, and, if I appear to be too easily won, you must attribute it to my hatred of equivocation and deceit. Your manly and ingenuous defence has carried conviction to my mind ; has increased —— has satisfied—I mean to say that all my scruples are removed ; and, in the firm conviction that your future course of life will justify my present confidence, I confess my —— my prepossession in your favour, and thus tender you my hand as frankly as you have solicited it.”

Utterly confounded at an acceptance not less cordial and flattering than unexpected—for he

little anticipated so quick a decision — Hunter seized the proffered hand, and pressed it to his lips in a speechless bewilderment. He had urged his presumptuous suit in desperation rather than in hope ; from a sense of duty to others, not from the impulses of his own heart ; and, though he had left nothing undone that might ensure it success, he could not expel from his bosom a latent wish that it might fail. That secret yearning was now for ever disappointed ; his self-sacrifice was accomplished, his misery stamped with the seal of perpetuity.

Overwhelmed with gratitude for the confidence and the affections of Helen, his thoughts reverted, nevertheless, to Rose Mayhew, now for ever lost, with a throb of anguish that gave him a foretaste of the life-long martyrdom to which he had doomed himself. Unable, after several ineffectual attempts at coherent speech, to rally his bewildered faculties, he struck his

hand upon his forehead, and rushed out of the room, ejaculating in a hoarse whisper :—"To-morrow — to-morrow — I cannot thank you now. I am overcome—astounded — air ! air ! I cannot breathe."

Vain, in the estimation of Helen, would have been the most eloquent effusion of love and gratitude, when compared with this paroxysm of ungovernable emotion, which elicited all the tender sympathies of her nature. "Strange," she exclaimed, "that a man whose sensibilities are so acute should have been so cold and unimpassioned, not only in his letter, but in the whole course of our colloquy, up to the very moment when I thawed the frozen barriers of his emotions by ——." Her soliloquy was interrupted by the sudden though noiseless entrance of Rose, her eyes glaring, her mouth half open, and every feature lighted up with an intense anxiety. Swift as thought, she ran up to Helen, placed her hands upon her shoulders,

peered for an instant into her countenance, and then, bursting into a wild hysterical laugh, exclaimed : — “ I see it — I see it in your looks ! Is not every thing happily settled ? Speak ! speak ! for God’s sake, keep me not in suspense.”

“ Give me but a moment’s time, my dear little picture of impatience, and I will tell you all. I cannot yet say that every thing is settled, but I have made more rapid progress than was, perhaps, quite decorous, more than could have been expected by any one unacquainted with the ductility of the female heart, when it is mollified by the affections.”

“ Every thing, then, is explained, and you have accepted him ? One word, only one single word ; I ask no more : why, why do you trifle with me ? ”

“ Rather let me ask why are you so petulant ? Prythee let my pride and reserve have a gentle descent, and suffer me, like Cæsar, to fall be-

comingly. Mr. Hunter's inebriety was an accident which I, of all people, ought not to visit severely, since it arose in some degree from the perturbation and fever of his mind upon my account. Most triumphantly has he refuted the calumnies of Mrs. Skinner and others; and, as to the little infirmities and peccadilloes which we have so often noticed, he admits them candidly, and confirms your repeated averment, that they are solely ascribable to the morbid action of a mind placed in an uncongenial element. Perhaps I have been too sanguine, too pliable, too confiding, but I yielded implicit credence to his tale; I trusted his assurance that better circumstances would make him a wiser and a better man. I believed him when he solemnly pledged himself to dedicate his whole future life to my happiness, and — and — and — psha! Why cannot you spare one's blushes. Why do you force me to own that I confessed his affection to be returned,

and made him a formal surrender of my hand?"

Nature could no longer sustain the struggle which had so long agitated the bosom of the sensitive and fragile Rose. She attempted to ejaculate "Thank God!" but the words died inaudibly away, her eyes closed, her lips were compressed, her hands clenched, and she fell into the arms of her friend in all the corpse-like rigidity of a fit.

CHAPTER XII.

“ Friendship is constant in all other things,
Save in the office and affairs of love ;
Therefore, all hearts in love use their own tongues.”
HAMLET.

ALTHOUGH this alarming paroxysm continued for some time, it yielded at length to the customary remedies ; when Rose, making light of her indisposition, which she attributed to an intense over-anxiety on her friend's account, earnestly intreated to know every thing that had passed at the recent interview. “ What ! ” she exclaimed, when the recital was completed, “ have you then made no arrangement with Mr. Hunter for your future interviews ? Too well do I know his proper and manly pride, to

believe that he will again pass the doors of this house, if he be considered an intruder."

"Grammercy ! my hasty friend ! was this a point for *me* to arrange ? would you have me accomplish impossibilities ? You forget that I had no sooner ' owned the soft impeachment ' of my love, and stretched forth my hand in confirmation of my sincerity, than my capricious suitor, instead of throwing himself upon his knees to thank me for my condescension, started like a guilty thing and fled."

" Poor fellow ! poor fellow ! " sighed Rose !
" Oh, how deeply do I feel — how much do I sympathize — how perfectly, I mean, can I understand his distress and bewilderment ! But this important omission must be repaired ; the happiness of too many persons is involved in this affair to permit the smallest delay. I must allow you no excuse for hesitation, still less for change of purpose. Mary Lomax possesses your entire confidence, and well she

may, for where should we find a more discreet and trustworthy girl? I will see her this morning, instantly, and we will arrange every thing between us."

"Grammercy, once more, my little Hotspur! You would have your actions like your thoughts, 'brief as the lightning in the collied night,' but I have not the smallest wish to huddle up my marriage with such unseemly precipitation; nor if I had, would I allow you, in your present weak and exhausted plight, to leave your couch or stir a single step in the business. Nay, I will not even grant you the privilege of our sex—you shall not talk, and so I will leave you to tranquillity and repose, which, I trust, are the only physicians you will require."

"For an hour or two I will patiently submit to your orders, in the hope that I may thus gather strength to break them;" and so saying, the affectionate girl drew her friend to her

bosom, embraced her tenderly, congratulated her over and over on her approaching happiness, thanked her with an impassioned energy for having taken her advice, and then, with uplifted hands and glistening eyes, invoked upon her the choicest blessings of Heaven.

Once more left at liberty to commune calmly with her own thoughts, Helen's mind was presently made up as to the course she should pursue. Her natural candour rendered her averse from concealments of any sort, while her courage and decision made her despise all temporizing expedients, especially when she saw no reason whatever for being ashamed of her actions. That the Bryants would bitterly condemn her choice, and strenuously urge her to retract her consent, she fully anticipated; but this conviction, which would have led a timid and irresolute girl to delay the communication of her purpose, only prompted the strong-minded Helen to a more immediate dis-

closure. Proceeding, therefore, to the parlour, where her uncle and aunt, who, like the generality of their class, possessed most accommodating appetites, were discussing a substantial luncheon before their early dinner, she plunged at once, *in medias res*, by exclaiming, with a gaiety of manner, which was meant to hide her real nervousness, "My good friends! be prepared for a surprise—I have some strange news for you."

"News!" cried the wharfinger; "there's no news. I have got the Stock Exchange prices up to one o'clock, and Omnium has not fluctuated more than an eighth per cent. all the morning."

"My intelligence does not refer to public, but to domestic, affairs — to our family circle here at Eagle Wharf. I hate to have my own feelings and curiosity trifled with, even for an instant, and therefore I will not tantalize your's, but tell you at once that — that — psha? why

should one mince the matter?—that I'm going to be married."

"Married!" simultaneously ejaculated both her auditors, the aunt suddenly replacing her uplifted wine glass on the table, while the uncle dropped his nether jaw, and for a minute ceased to masticate. The former, however, presently recovering herself, tossed off her bumper, looked significantly at her husband, and then said, with a chuckling laugh, "Tush! child! a nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse. I did not expect you and he would have come to an understanding so rapidly, but I will bet a guinea that I can name the happy man."

"I rather think not," replied Helen, smiling.

"Pooh! don't tell me. Didn't I give him the hint myself?—and haven't I been constantly edging and nudging him on to strike up to you, and truly he seems to have struck while the

iron was hot. Come, come, Helen ! you can't deceive me ; I can see as far into a mill-stone as most people. You may finish your cold pork, my dear Mr. B.—you've no call to be alarmed ; so far from it quite the reverse, and thanks to me for the whole of it. Now then, child ! if I don't describe your sweetheart to the very life, without naming him, I give you leave to call me a blind buzzard."

"I shall be glad to have a specimen of your skill in divination," laughed Helen.

"In the first place, then, he is young, and genteel, and good-looking, and clever, rather above the middling size, with dark curling hair."

"Right ; a palpable hit !" said Helen, somewhat surprised.

"You got acquainted with him under this roof ! you had a sneaking kindness for him from the very first ; he is the very man of all others that Mr. B. and myself would have

chosen for your husband, and his Christian name begins with an A.”

Helen, who really began to imagine that her secret was discovered, though she could not at all account for her aunt’s evident delight at the match, when she had anticipated nothing but the most furious opposition, was too much confused for the moment to make any reply.

“Ha ! is it so ? I have hit the right nail on the head, have I ?” cried the exulting aunt, as she snapped her fingers and chuckled aloud. “Ha ! ha ! ha ! let me alone for smelling out a rat. My dear Mr. B., I congratulate you ; this is what we have all along been wishing. It’s all owing to me. You must confess I always was an uncommon good manager. Well, well, Helen dear ! you needn’t blush and look so sheepish ; there’s nothing to be ashamed of—it will be a particular good match for you, I can tell you that. Mr. B. and I most gladly give our consent to it ; and I think we can

both promise that you will never repent your bargain, but find a most eligible and excellent husband in our dear Ambrose."

"Ambrose!" ejaculated Helen — "What Ambrose?"

"Why, Ambrose Bryant, to be sure! our son, the captain. Only think of the young slyboots keeping it all so snug!"

"Snug, indeed," resumed Helen; "for he never opened his lips to me on the subject."

"What do you mean, child? you speak in riddles. To whom, then, in the name of fate, *are* you going to be married?"

"To Mr. Alfred Hunter!" said Helen, slowly and distinctly.

For some seconds utter amazement again deprived both her auditors of their breath, which they had no sooner recovered, than they repeatedly ejaculated the word "Hunter!" in various tones of incredulous and increasing wonderment.

"Helen!" at length wheezed the agitated aunt, with a reproachful look, "you are much too fond of bantering and quizzing; I always told you so. This is no time and no subject for joking."

"I am quite aware of it, and I never was more serious in my life. Allow me, in all the solemnity of truth, to repeat that I am engaged to Mr. Hunter."

Mr. Bryant looked inquiringly in her face, and, being convinced that she was perfectly serious, he thought it best to put an end to the affair at once by blurting out, "Why the fellow's a lame duck, a bankrupt, hasn't a single dump, not worth a brass button;" after which he assumed the conclusive look of a man who imagines that he has advanced an unanswerable objection.

"Of all this I am perfectly aware," said Helen, calmly: "and it is the more fortunate, therefore, that I have money enough for both."

—“What ! marry a beggar, a discarded wharf clerk, an outcast !” cried the wife. “My dear child, you cannot be serious. Why, with your handsome fortune, you ought to insist upon having an equal property with your husband.”

“There we differ, dear aunt. It is precisely because I *have* a handsome fortune that I can dispense with riches in the man of my choice.”

“But it’s so particular disrespectful to marry a menial, as one may say, a fellow who is as poor as a church-mouse, and, at the same time, quite saucy and arrogant, and cannot be made to feel that hungry dogs must eat dirty pudding. I have read in some book or another, that Lucifer fell on account of his pride ; but methinks this poor, penniless, decayed gentleman is prouder after his fall than ever he was before, which is what, for my part, I cannot at all understand.”

“Because you do not recollect that there are two sorts of pride — that which envies and covets the dignity of another, and that which is solely jealous to maintain its own. Mr. Hunter can fall without stooping.”

“But *you* will do both if you throw yourself away upon him, and make a fool of yourself besides. Well ! I did think a niece of mine would have had a better taste, and not show herself such a poor, mean-spirited — why, what will all your friends say, what will the world say, if you make such a scandalous bad match ? ”

“I know what they ought to say ; and therefore I shall be perfectly indifferent to their censures, if they say what they ought not.”

“This palavering is all gammon,” cried the wrathful wharfinger. “You’re a silly girl, the fellow’s a scamp, who will make ducks and drakes of your property, and I’ll never,

never give my consent to your marrying him ; that's one word for all."

"I am sorry for it, because I would not willingly offend you ; but as I shall be my own mistress in a very few weeks—"

"Ay, ay—you need n't tell me that. Well, I give you fair warning that the fellow's a fortune-hunter, a lazy vagabond, a jail-bird, a drunkard, a spendthrift, a passionate, proud, conceited, ungrateful jackanapes ; and what's worse than all, that he's not worth a sixpenny piece, and never will be. And so if you choose, when you come of age, to let such a loose fish swindle you out of your fortune, you must e'en go to the devil your own way. Only don't let him cross my threshold, that's all."

It was, perhaps, fortunate for the utterer of this coarse invective, that at its conclusion he stumped rapidly away, puffing and blowing with choler, for Helen's kindling eyes and red-

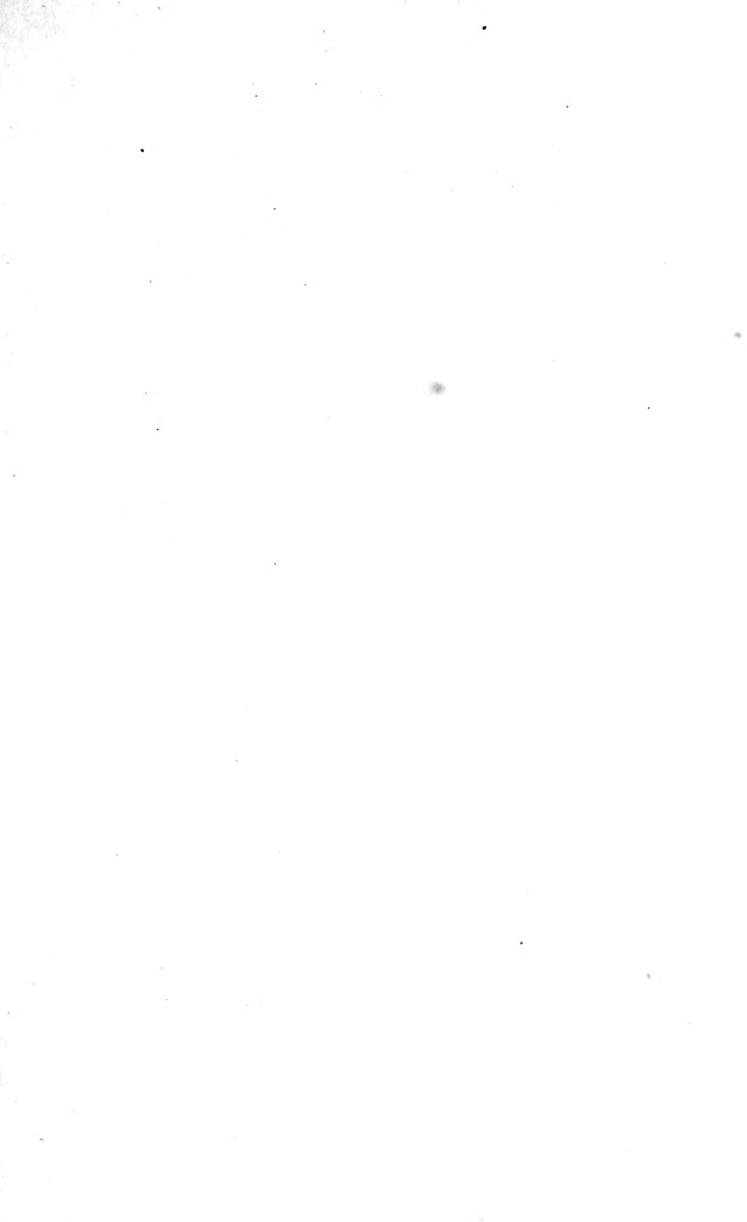
dened cheeks showed that she was prepared to vindicate with a proper spirit her own right of choice, as well as the character of her lover, thus outrageously assailed.

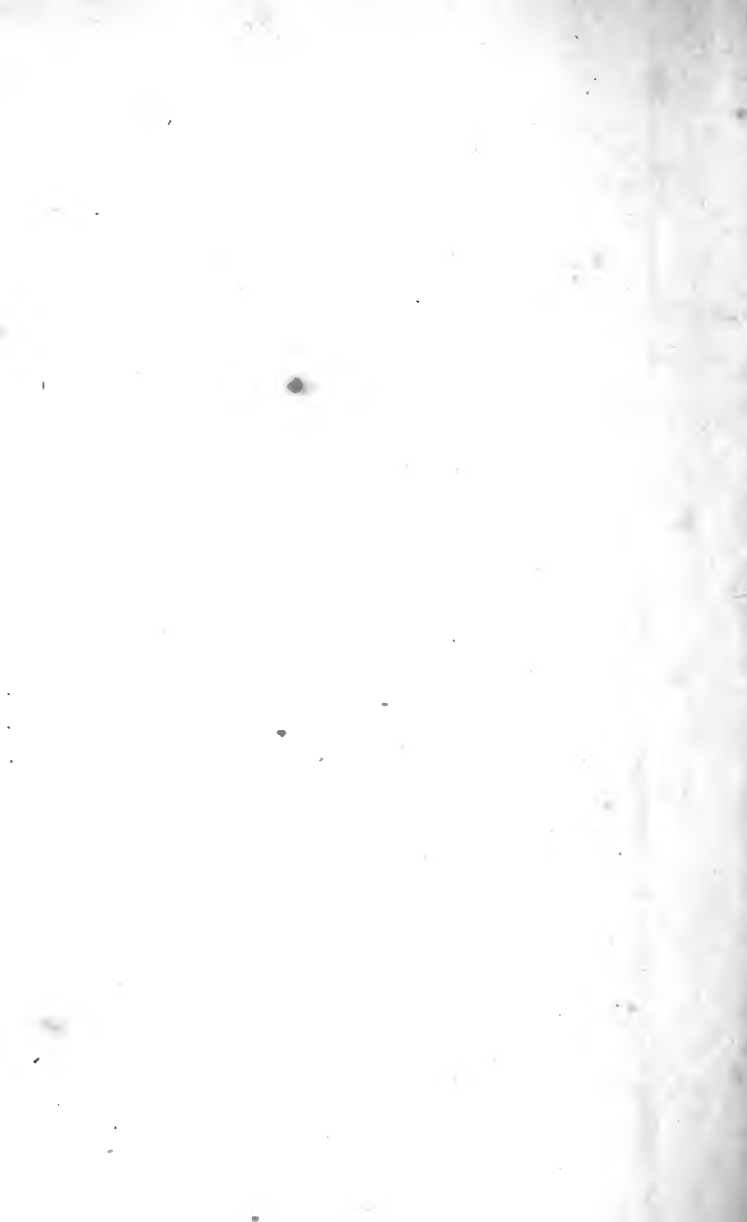
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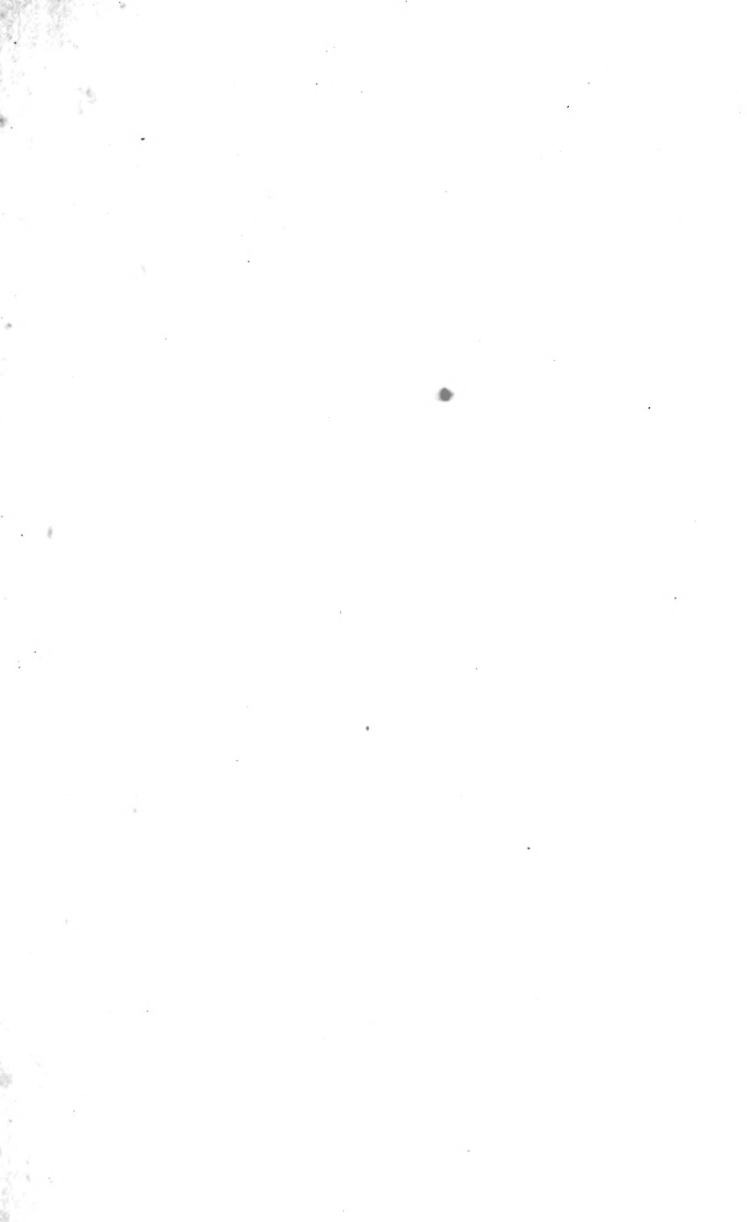
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